

**WILL BREXIT
BREAK GREAT BRITAIN?
DOMINIC GREEN**

the weekly

Standard

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TROUBLED SEOUL

ETHAN EPSTEIN
on the turmoil in Korea

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Don't Cry for Me, Paparazzi

There once was an informal editorial motto that guided the selection of topics in *Style*, the *Washington Post* lifestyle section: "If a story is worth doing, it's worth doing every year." But in the age of Trump, that schedule has become rather compressed: The *Post* is now doing the same article about Melania every couple of months.

It was at the end of January the *Style* section let loose with "The AWOL first lady," decrying Melania's demure, if not diffident, approach to being the president's spouse. "Melania Trump appears to be in no hurry to heed the call of duty," was how reporter Krissah Thompson denounced the Donald's bride. And now, come March 28, the creative team at the *Post* is back, this time with a big *Style* section cover story, "Melania Trump's vanishing act."

Which raises a philosophical question: If Mrs. Trump was absent two months ago, how can it be that she is now "vanishing"?

We should note that when the first of these two articles appeared, *THE SCRAPBOOK* tut-tutted that, *pace* the *Post*, Melania's lack of interest in "the folderol of official Washington" was "sensible and then some." The second of the two articles only confirms our judgment.

In this new article, the *Post* is solicitous of the many upstanding citizens who have been discomfited by



Melania's choice to hole up on the 58th floor of Trump Tower. The first four paragraphs are dedicated to the heart-rending plight of the paparazzi whom she has stumped: "When it comes to getting people, I don't miss," photographer Miles Diggs told the *Post*. "But Melania has just been so elusive." Oh, the humanity!

It's not just celebrity-bushwhackers whom Melania has buffaloes. She has flummoxed an "ever-clamorous chorus of gossipmongers, pundits, historians and even body-language experts." For this, one would think she might

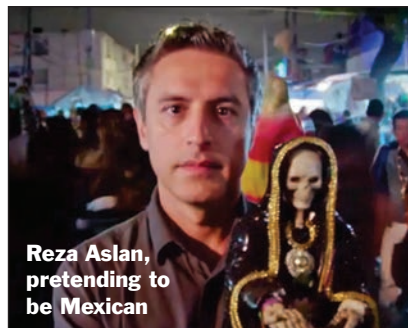
be in line for an honorary Nobel. But no, the *Post*'s Paul Schwartzman (aided by staff writer Justin Jouvenal—this being a story that warrants team coverage) is not in that generous a mood. Her absences are "unnerving," Schwartzman writes. "The first lady is invisible"—this because, among the gewgaws and trinkets at the Trump Tower gift shop, there's nary a Melania tchotchke to be found; and when the first lady is present, she is a sphinx of a sylph—well, that or just a vapid fashion "mannequin," "oblivious to the chatter around her."

It's a measure of the desperation the *Post* must feel in its quest to harry Melania that they have been driven to pondering the plight of not just one, nor even two, but three of the grown men who make their living snapping pictures of the famous and the infamous. Not only does the article begin with how the first lady makes their lives difficult, it returns, toward the end, to talk about how their efforts have largely been thwarted. The frustration drives paparazzo Diggs to fantasize: He longs for a "photo of her coming out of Barneys with a bunch of shopping bags" and drools at the prospect of how the image would sell. He even has a perfect cliché of a headline in mind: "First Lady Shops Till She Drops."

The *Post* seems to all but drool along with him. ♦

The Great Pretender

The left's favorite scribbler on spiritual subjects, Reza Aslan, caused a small fuss recently with the first episode of his new CNN religion series: He participated in a little ritual cannibalism. But eating human brains isn't the only zombie-like behavior by the Iranian-American author: There is his habit of repeating and repeat-



ing and repeating the same tired joke.

Take the interview of Aslan by Ana Marie Cox in the *New York Times Magazine* (please!): "Apparently because you didn't want people to know that you were from Iran, you used to tell people you were Mexican," Cox said, asking him about his immigrant childhood. Ever witty, Aslan shot back, off the cuff: "Yeah, that tells you how little I knew about America. I didn't realize

ABOVE: TWS / MELANIA, NEWS.COM; BELOW: CNN

you guys don't like Mexicans either."

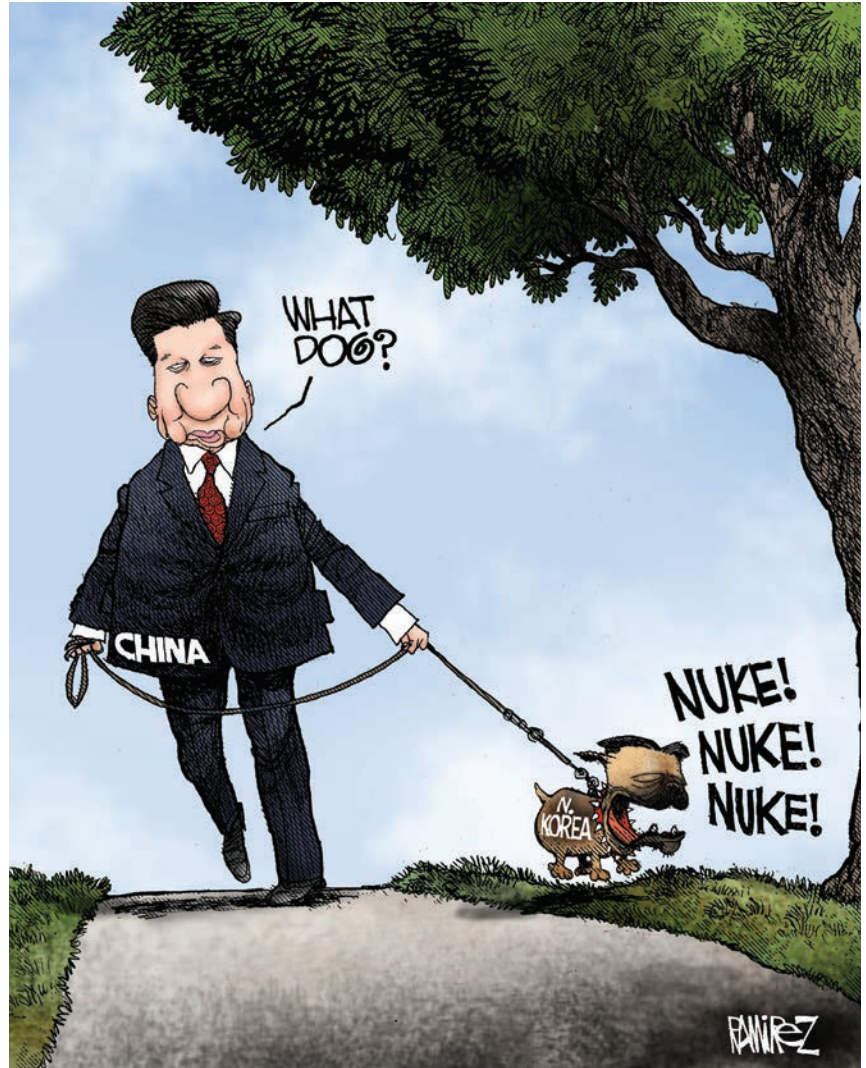
Ha, ha—that's a good one! But maybe not as off-the-cuff as it would seem. Aslan told the 2015 Aspen Ideas Festival that he "spent a good part of the 1980s pretending to be Mexican." And then the punchline: "Yeah. Which by the way tells you how little I understood America, because it did not help at all. It turns out we don't like Mexicans that much either."

Aslan has been working—or perhaps more correctly, *overworking*—the "I pretended to be Mexican" joke for years. In 2010, he told *Los Angeles* magazine, "I spent most of the '80s pretending to be Mexican, and I was very successful at it." The next year he was at an obligatory TED conference: "For those of you who recall the eighties—not a great time to be Iranian in America," he told the audience. "I spent most of the early eighties pretending to be Mexican."

That said, Aslan sometimes offers slight variations in his delivery. There is the "how little I understood (or knew) America" formulation noted above, and then there is the "your ethnicity is in trouble" trope: "I spent a good part of the eighties pretending to be Mexican," he told a *HuffPost Live* interviewer in 2013. "You know that your ethnicity is in trouble when you think Americans will treat you better if you pretend you're a Mexican." Two years later, Aslan told *Playboy*: "I spent a good part of the 1980s pretending to be Mexican—which, by the way, did not help matters at all. This says something about how deeply in trouble your particular ethnic community is when you assume Americans will treat you better if you say you're a Mexican."

"In the eighties it was not a good time to be from Iran," he told the Los Angeles World Affairs Council in 2014. "I used to pretend I was Mexican." He told the "Hound Tall" podcast the same thing, and even trotted out a phony barrio accent to prove that he was a practiced impersonator of others' ethnicity.

He's told the story far and wide. "I actually spent a good part of the 1980s pretending to be Mexican," Aslan told the Jaipur Literature Festival



in 2014. He repeated it to Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper.

In September he told an audience at the University of Texas at Arlington, "I've admitted on numerous occasions that I spent a good portion of the 1980s pretending to be Mexican." You can say that again.

Of late, Aslan appears to be trying to find new formulations for his old laugh-lines. "I used to tell people I was Mexican," Aslan told *Vox* early this year. "It was very important that we kept the whole Muslim-Iranian thing on the down-low." Ah yes, the *down-low*—an excellent touch of vernacular that freshens the bit up nicely.

To be honest, we don't begrudge Aslan his crutch, even if it's about as funny as a crutch. After all, where

would Henny Youngman have been without "Take my wife"? ♦

Inappropriation Dept.

We opened the *New York Times* last week, and were sadly unsurprised to read an article that began thusly:

We all encounter art we don't like, that upsets and infuriates us. This doesn't deserve to be exhibited, our brains yell; it should not be allowed to exist. Still, does such aversion mean that an artwork must be removed from view—or, worse, destroyed?

This question has been at the heart of the controversy...

The last time THE SCRAPBOOK checked, destroying art was the

province of fascists. But the propriety of destroying offending artworks—even well-meaning works that offend only because there are some eager to be offended—now seems to be an open question among the artsy set themselves.

The offending art debuted at the Whitney Biennial, which opened in New York in March: a painting titled “Open Casket,” by artist Dana Schutz.



Schutz's 'Open Casket'

The work is based on the well-known photo of Emmett Till's mutilated body, an image that helped ignite the modern civil rights movement. The painting is somewhat impressionistic, but clearly a somber and respectful statement about the powerful original.

The problem is not with the painting but with the painter. Dana Schutz, you see, is white. This is unacceptable to Hannah Black, a British artist and writer opposed to “the appropriation of Black culture by non-Black artists.” She penned an open letter to the Whitney curators (a letter that, naturally, went viral) with the riff “The painting must go.” And she didn't just mean from the exhibition: The letter begins with “the urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed,” and goes on to declare that “white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights.”

Times critic Roberta Smith, to her credit, ultimately dismissed the idea that offending works of art be destroyed. In defending Schutz's painting, Smith pointed out that some works of art vital to the civil rights movement had authors who were not African American—she gives as an example the Billie Holiday classic

“Strange Fruit,” composed by a Jewish songwriter, Abel Meeropol, who, not unlike Schutz, was haunted by the photo of a lynching.

However, Smith is unwilling to take on Hannah Black's contention that the original sin of whites constrains their rights of free speech and creative freedom. It seems the best that the *Times* critic can muster is to say that whites should be able to take on “an all-too-American subject, that of hateful, corrosive white racism.” Because, after all, “Who owns that?”

But what is most corrosive is the notion that one's race limits and determines what one can do, what one can say, what one can perform, what one can paint. It's a self-defeating notion, too: After all, who is it who has suffered most from restrictions based on race? Who has the most to gain from the elimination of such restrictions?

How sad that in an effort to seize exclusive rights to portrayals of the black experience, there are artists and writers who further the pernicious idea that race trumps art. Beauty. Ugliness. Kindness. Brutality. Love. Hate. Such is the stuff of the human condition. It's also the stuff of art, no matter the race of the artist. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

“The flower crown, a go-to accessory for Coachella fashionistas, has its share of critics. Flower crowns are basic, they've been done, but hey, at least they're not Native American headdresses.

“Now there's good news for those looking to upgrade their hippie-inspired garment game: A marijuana-laden flower crown, introduced just in time . . .”

—Caleb Pershan, sfist.com

This Week in Trumpoplexy

“Trump may have signed Earth's death warrant.”

—Van Jones, CNN

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Time Bandits

In the fall of 1977—40 years ago now, when we were freshmen at Georgetown—four of us climbed up to steal the hands off the clock on the tower of Healy Hall, 150 feet or so above the quad.

I'm not sure why the adventure came back to mind recently. Or maybe I am. Over the past few months I've seen notices of the deaths of classmates, both high school and college. We're of an age, all of us from those days, that mortality is sad, yes, but not exactly tragic anymore. On the actuarial tables, it's only a little unexpected. A little unforeseen. Heart attacks do kill people in their late fifties. Cancer stalks us. Degenerative diseases begin to manifest.

There's an old tradition of Georgetown students trying to steal the hands from the two faces, east and west, of the clock on Healy. Finished in 1879, the building includes Gaston Hall on the north, the old Riggs Library on the south, and the clock tower in the middle—the three-part silhouette against the skyline that every Washingtonian knows. The theft of the clock hands peaked in the mid-1960s and then gradually petered out (although campus reports suggest a new spike in the 2000s).

But one day, our freshman year, a kid from South Carolina named Pat Conway stopped by my room in New North to say he had found something interesting in the quad. We were all urban climbers, in those days. The National Cathedral, up Wisconsin Avenue, was the Everest of Washington buildings, with near-permanent scaffolding that gave amateur building climbers, the club of stegophilists, a start up its Gothic sides. George-

town's quad had its own attractions, though. The fire escape on Maguire, for example, led to slate roofs, which could be traversed to the battlements above Riggs, for a nice view of the city.

Pat had been interested, however, in the other side of Healy's roofs. A small square of wrought-iron fencing, a widow's walk, sat on top of



the northern rise above Gaston Hall. So Pat climbed up to it—and found a trapdoor that revealed narrow wooden stairs leading down. The next night, we gathered up flashlights and two more of our friends: Stan DeTurris from Poughkeepsie and Dave Barry from Matawan. Out to the roof from a gabled window on the top floor of Old North, through the valleys of the jumbled roofs above Gaston, up to the widow's walk, and down the rickety stairs into the attics of Healy.

One door blocked our passage, but Dave jiggered it open. And then we had a straight walk to the central tower and up the stairs through years of pigeon guano. A small door on the clock face let us reach out to pry the hands off the eastern dial, look-

ing out on Washington. The tradition was to send the hands to the Vatican, asking the pope to bless them, but Paul VI was elderly and failing. So we hid the hands under the floorboards of the balcony in Gaston Hall until the end of the academic year, when we presented them to the school's president during his visit to our dorm floor.

A year and a half later, in the spring of 1979, Stan found another way to the tower, crawling through the air-conditioning ducts above the iron balconies in Riggs Library. That time, Stan and I took the minute hands from each of the clock faces. As I remember, we left them leaning against the front door of campus security. In 2014, I was invited to give a talk in the old library, but I spent most of my lecture eyeing the ducts for a route to the attic.

Pat Conway dropped out soon after we took the clock hands, leaving school to work with Fr. Richard McSorley in peace campaigns. Dave Barry went on to Georgetown Law, practicing in New Jersey. Stan DeTurris is a noted surgeon in Florida. And I . . . mostly, I just plod along these days, and in the mornings I read

the obituary pages.

Still, once every year or two, I have a dream about mountaineering on the quad, from the slate gables of New North around to the roof of Ryan Hall. The dreams often involve a vertigo now that I never felt when I was young: a feeling that I might miss my footing on the old gray slate and fall to the bricks below.

I suppose we might have been trying to create a symbol, as we pried those hands off the Healy clock: metaphorically demanding that time stop. But I suspect it isn't true, for we would have had to know then that time really was passing. And we only learned about time later, as we slipped down through the years.

JOSEPH BOTTUM

Washington Hasn't Changed

No politician is bigger than the game. This is not a lesson unique to President Donald Trump, though he doubtless has a new appreciation for how entrenched Washington is in its ways. But it may be a revelation to some of the millions who voted for him, energized by a pledge that this would finally be the guy to shake up the system. In the last two months, Trump has been taking the country on a wild ride. But the roller coaster is still in the same amusement park.

Consider:

The infighting that has inhibited the congressional GOP in recent years has remained and perhaps been exacerbated. CNN reporter Eric Bradner captured this well on Twitter last week with a screenshot, which he summarized as follows:

The state of the GOP this morning, in four tweets:
 Trump vs. Freedom Caucus
 Freedom Caucus vs. Trump
 Ryan vs. Trump
 Corker vs. Ryan



First came the president's tweet: "The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast. We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!" (Never mind that the House Freedom Caucus and Democrats together comprise a majority of members in the lower chamber.) This provoked a retort to Trump from Freedom Caucus member Rep. Justin Amash: "It didn't take long for the swamp to drain [you]. No shame, Mr. President. Almost everyone succumbs to the D.C. Establishment." There followed a note of concern from House speaker Paul Ryan: "What I worry about . . . is that if we don't do this, then [Trump] will just go to work with Democrats to try & change Obamacare." That provoked an admonition from Sen. Bob Corker: "We have come a long way in our country when the speaker of one party urges a president NOT to work with the other party to solve a problem." It's an even longer way when one party faction, the moderate GOP Tuesday Group, vows not to work with another, the conservative Freedom Caucus, as *National Journal's* Daniel Newhauser reported. "If that call comes in, just hang up," Rep. Chris Collins of the Tuesday Group reportedly said.

All these comments follow the failure of the American Health Care Act, the latest instance of what has become a chronic issue for Republicans: trouble passing significant bills. In 2012, then-speaker John Boehner pulled tax legislation from the floor during the infamous, Christmastime "fiscal cliff" saga. In 2013, Boehner pulled a temporary government spending bill over the "defund Obamacare" fight. In 2014, he pulled a border bill. In 2015, Boehner resigned. In 2016, Ryan began his first full year as speaker, and Trump won the White House. Mere weeks into 2017, the pattern has repeated with the Republican health bill. Some call these times uncertain. The counterargument is that they're quite predictable.

The same goes for the politicking of Democrats, which has been unaffected by the passing of the leadership baton from Sen. Harry Reid to Sen. Chuck Schumer. In Judge Neil Gorsuch, the Supreme Court has a justice-in-waiting who has been roundly praised by liberal lawyers, former students, and even by some Democratic senators, such as Senate Judiciary Committee ranking member Dianne Feinstein, who are now skeptical of him. Eleven years ago, during the confirmation process of Samuel Alito, Feinstein said a High Court nominee would need to have engaged in "moral turpitude" to warrant a filibuster. "Now, I mean, this is a man I might disagree with," she said then. "That doesn't mean he shouldn't be on the court." She described Alito as "clearly qualified" and possessing "an even demeanor"; she described Gorsuch recently as "a very caring person" and "obviously legally very smart." So naturally, she helped delay her committee's vote on Gorsuch's appointment by a week, as Democrats ponder a filibuster. She cited three reasons for doing so. Not one of them was "moral turpitude."

On the horizon: The possibility of yet another government shutdown—what is this, number 5,144?—looms. Federal funding is set to expire in less than a month, on April 28. There has been chatter that money for Trump's border wall would be stuffed into a must-pass measure to keep Washington open, a certain nonstarter for Democrats. Ryan indicated on March 30 that Republicans would avoid such maneuvers. "We're not going to have a government shutdown," he said. Then there's the federal

GARY LOCKE

debt limit, which had been suspended in 2015 and supposedly became effective again on March 16, though in fact it is being ignored. The Treasury Department is taking so-called “extraordinary measures” to forestall default on certain obligations. Those measures of course aren’t so extraordinary when they’re taken all the time, like in 2011, 2013, and 2015. It’s now 2017. Must be a biennial party.

There’s no denying that Trump’s presidency is in many ways a seismic event. And there’s no denying the sometimes cataclysmic effect of earthquakes: They can topple tall buildings, generate deadly tsunamis, and destroy bridges and highways. Swamps, on the other hand, are relatively unaffected.

—Chris Deaton

The Year’s at the Spring

*The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hillside’s dew-pearled;
The lark’s on the wing;
The snail’s on the thorn:
God’s in His heaven—
All’s right with the world!*

—“Pippa’s Song,” Robert Browning, 1841



As momentous events like the NCAA basketball finals and Major League Baseball’s opening day remind us: It’s spring. Which, as bards through the centuries have instructed us, is a good thing. Who are we to quarrel with the poetic wisdom of the ages?

So we welcome spring 2017. And the first thing to note is that, in many respects, all remains well. This nation still enjoys a degree of peace and prosperity, a level of physical and material well-being, perhaps unmatched in human history.

But man does not live by bread and security alone. What about our more spiritual side? Well, consider signs of health from the world of sports. From Villanova’s win at the buzzer in last year’s NCAA basketball championship, through the Cavaliers’ comeback from a 3 to 1 deficit to win the NBA finals, to the Chicago Cubs World Series victory (also after being down 3 to 1), to a thrilling college football championship game, to the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history—this past year couldn’t have been better. The only thing that could make it better would be a victory by Harvard’s men’s

hockey team in the “Frozen Four” this week. That would be a fitting capstone to an *annus mirabilis*.

But you ask: Are sports really an indicator of spiritual well-being? I’ll appeal to the authority of Winston Churchill, writing in the second chapter of his great biography of his ancestor the Duke of Marlborough:

It is important to remember also the differences of feeling and outlook which separate the men and women of these times from ourselves. They gave a very high—indeed, a dominating—place in their minds to religion. It played as large a part in the life of the seventeenth century as sport does now.

Do sports not make up much of modern spiritual life?

In any case, to return to spring 2017, one still has to ask: If all is well, why does one sense that all is not well?

It cannot merely be the presidency of Donald Trump—though that is not a heartening sight. It cannot merely be the back-to-back presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, though their 12 years bid fair to exhibit the twin foolishnesses of shallow elitist progressivism and silly populist nationalism. It cannot even be the 28 years of baby boomer presidencies to which the nation will have been subjected by 2020, as the worst generation charts its feckless and destructive course through the annals of the nation’s history.

One senses something deeper at play. One senses that the much-diagnosed crisis of the West—a crisis of confidence, nerve, and understanding—is upon us. One senses that the valiant attempts of statesmen and intellectuals to deal with this crisis, or at least to avert its most dangerous manifestations, may have run their course. The efforts of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, of Bill Buckley and Irving Kristol, of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Václav Havel were to a remarkable degree successful. All honor to them. Many are the lessons to be learned from them.

And yet here we are—with demagogues as leaders, with a civic culture as superficial as it is complacent, with a domestic liberal order in incipient crisis and a world liberal order hanging on for dear life.

We don’t know why spring, a time of good cheer and rebirth, has brought on these gloomy reflections. Perhaps it’s precisely the coming of spring that makes vivid how un-spring-like our current condition is, how deeply we feel that all’s not right in the world.

Or, as the American doggerel version of “Pippa’s Song” puts it:

*It’s spring, it’s spring
The bird is on the wing—
My word, absurd!
The wing is on the bird.*

In other words: All’s not right with the world. But nor is all wrong. Nature and politics are what they have always been. The wing remains on the bird.

—William Kristol

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

The recipe for successful tax reform.

BY FRED BARNES



Ronald Reagan signs tax reform into law, October 1986.

The late columnist Robert Novak had a favorite saying about the GOP: “The only reason God created Republicans was to cut taxes.” And the 1980s were a perfect world for doing so.

President Reagan’s across-the-board cuts on individual income tax rates in 1981 were followed by sweeping tax reform in 1986 that reduced the top rate to 28 percent while wiping out special tax breaks and broadening the tax base. The top rate had been 70 percent when Reagan was first elected.

Republicans had fulfilled their destiny, but they didn’t do it on their own. Two Democrats, Senator Bill Bradley and Rep. Dick Gephardt, were first out of the gate with a plan for tax reform. Reagan’s reaction was to order up a reform scheme that left special interests out in the cold. A compromise was

thrashed out. The House passed tax reform 292-136, the Senate 74-23. It was bipartisan nirvana.

Today, bipartisanship is a fleeting memory. Enacting tax reform in 2017 will be difficult and politically painful, if not impossible. Even if all goes well for President Trump and Republicans, it won’t pass until August at the earliest. That’s too long to wait. The animal spirits unleashed by Trump’s election can’t sustain strong economic growth forever.

What’s needed is a simplified plan of few parts that creates jobs and attracts Democratic allies. The economists who drafted the plan Trump campaigned on last year, Larry Kudlow and Steve Moore, have proposed one.

It would cut the tax rate on corporate income from 35 percent to 20 percent. To repatriate overseas profits, it would tax them at 10 percent. (The House Republican plan would set that rate at 8.5 percent.) And it

would include hundreds of billions in spending for infrastructure, the top goal of labor unions and a boon to Democratic support. That’s all. It’s that simple.

The rest of tax reform—the harder parts—would be left for later. It’s unfortunate, but cutting the top rate on individual income would have to wait. The Trump campaign plan would slash it to 33 percent from 39.6 percent. But Democrats strongly oppose rate cuts, especially reductions in the top rate. They want to raise the rates on personal income.

Besides, the wealthiest Americans aren’t clamoring for a rate cut at the moment. They’re doing fine, as they did throughout the high-tax Obama years. *Forbes* magazine found there are 25 more billionaires in the United States today (565 in all) than last year. The rich can wait.

The 20 percent border adjustment tax on imports, which is part of the House Republican tax plan, would not be included. It’s a poison pill that divides the coalition for tax reform. It’s also a distraction that focuses on what many people—retailers, for instance—don’t like.

Nor would tax preferences for various narrow interests be targeted for elimination. That effort is bound to generate an angry class of tax-reform losers, as it did in 1986. The plan would not be deficit neutral, though repatriation should reap \$200 billion or so in revenue. Democrats didn’t worry about the deficit in 2009 when they passed an \$800 billion stimulus. They won’t now, once they’re on board.

That the plan has only three parts is important. A lesson from the failure of repeal-and-replace-Obamacare was that it was too complicated. “When people don’t understand something,” Moore says, “they’re not for it.” Not only average folks, but plenty of House members and TV talking heads didn’t have a clue.

The scaled-down tax plan doesn’t have a problem like that. But is it a jobs bill? I think so. Cuts in the corporate tax rate are associated with wage hikes. A cut this big is likely to create a surge in jobs. And the estimated

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\$200 billion in repatriated profits will add significantly to the jobs buildup. Republicans would be smart to call it a “jobs bill” or a “massive jobs bill” rather than talk up a “corporate tax cut” and “repatriation” combo.

As critical as it is for the bill to be bipartisan, I’m unsure whether splurging on infrastructure is enough to lure Democrats. Sweeteners may be required, along the lines suggested by financial consultant David Smick, author of the bestselling new book *The Great Equalizer: How Main Street Capitalism Can Create an Economy for Everyone*.

To “fashion a true bipartisan grand bargain that includes lower corporate tax rates, repatriation, infrastructure spending, and other items on the GOP agenda,” he would add “items Democrats highly value, including worker mobility vouchers and a modest, phased-in hike in the minimum wage that protects small business solvency.”

Smick proposed these concessions in the context of full-blown tax reform. But if it takes entitlements like these to win over Democrats, they should be embraced. Next to a huge reduction in the business tax rate, they are small potatoes. Small business, by the way, would be included in the rate cut.

There’s one problem that conservatives, supply-siders especially, will raise. If cuts in income tax rates are skipped now, they may never happen. That’s the risk. And it’s a real one. But it’s worth taking at this crucial moment.

It’s not just the economy that urgently needs to be juiced up. Trump and Republicans do too. Recovery from the repeal-and-replace disaster won’t occur, politically anyway, until it’s pushed aside by a highly visible success.

The confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court will help. But a bipartisan tax measure will do a whole lot more.

Robert Novak had another saying. “The only way to look at politicians is down,” he said. The politicians he looked up to had one thing in common. They cut taxes. ♦



Everybody’s Fault

Lessons from the health-care failure.

BY JAY COST

After the failure of the American Health Care Act (AHCA)—the House Republican alternative to Obamacare—there was plenty of blame to go around. President Donald Trump pointed his finger at the House Freedom Caucus (HFC), the group of 30 or so conservatives who largely opposed the bill, tweeting, “The Republican House Freedom Caucus was able to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. After so many bad years they were ready for a win!”

It was not just Trump making such claims. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board blasted the HFC, saying they “sabotaged” the “fragile legislative balance” that the House GOP leadership was looking to build. “When one of their demands was met,” the *Journal* wrote, “they dug in and made another until they exceeded what the rest of the GOP conference could concede. You can’t have a good-faith negotiation when one party doesn’t know how to say yes—or won’t.”

The HFC has certainly earned a reputation over the years for bucking leadership. But they were hardly alone in killing off the AHCA. Whip counts by the major news outlets showed that moderates and party regulars were also skeptical. Indeed, the death knell for the AHCA was rung by Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen of New Jersey’s

11th District, chairman of the Appropriations Committee and hardly a conservative hardliner. When he came out against the bill, that was that.

To be certain, the Freedom Caucus definitely deserves a quotient of the blame. After all, they had years to develop a palatable alternative to Obamacare and never did so. But their responsibility pales in comparison to the culpability of President Trump, who—as detailed by Tim Alberta of *Politico*—botched the sales job of the AHCA at multiple points. He alienated crucial members, sent mixed signals about his opinion of the bill, and seemed unaware of the specific issues that were dividing congressional Republicans. And the balance of the failure belongs to the House GOP leadership, including Speaker Paul Ryan. The AHCA was a bad bill.

So sure, the Freedom Caucus refused to take half a loaf and ended up with nothing. But let’s take a closer look at that loaf. The AHCA was not merely setting tax or spending levels, policy domains where splitting the difference makes sense. It was also trying to reform Medicaid and the individual insurance marketplace along more conservative lines.

The individual marketplace was the main stumbling block. This market is like a Jenga puzzle. A raft of state and federal regulations interlock with public subsidies to create a structure that if tinkered with in the wrong way will

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GARY LOCKE

come crashing down. *This* is where the AHCA was a failure.

While many parts of the law were popular with conservatives, in its totality the AHCA would have destabilized the individual marketplace, or at least made it a much more difficult place for many people to buy insurance. By eliminating Obamacare's mandate to buy insurance, keeping the regulations that inflate the price of insurance, and fidgeting around with the public subsidies, the AHCA would have left certain classes of people in the lurch. Among them are Americans in their early 60s—who, incidentally, are a key Republican constituency.

From this perspective, the HFC was not being obstinate by making all sorts of demands. It was trying to fix a bad bill. It was not refusing to take half a loaf; it was refusing Solomon's suggestion to cut the baby in half.

The House leadership's counter to this reasoning is that the rules of the Senate forbid them to tinker with Obamacare too much. That point remains contested, but even if it is true, it does not excuse the AHCA. Republicans are still obliged to write a good bill according to the rules of Congress. They simply did not do that with the AHCA. If a full repeal and replacement of Obamacare cannot be produced because of the Senate rules, the House GOP should have admitted as much and set its sights on a target that could be acquired—like reforming Medicaid. Indeed, doing nothing would arguably be preferable to the AHCA.

It is hard to get around the idea that for all their campaign talk over the last eight years, Republicans just do not know what to do about Obamacare. It is not for nothing that around the time that passage of the AHCA was looking shaky, Republicans began openly fretting that a protracted fight over health care would prevent it from getting corporate tax reform done. This raises troubling questions about the congressional GOP's priorities. For seven years, repealing and replacing Obamacare has been the party's central campaign issue, yet it is governing like

corporate tax reform is its number one goal. Is the congressional GOP's heart even in the health care fight, or was this just an empty promise made to the voters who don't feel like they have much of a stake in a border adjustment tax?

It is striking to contrast Ryan's efforts on the AHCA with his Medicare reform plan. Whatever the merits of the GOP's Medicare plan, at least it is based on an *idea*—namely, shifting Medicare from a fee-for-service entitlement to a premium-support program. The AHCA, on the other hand, was a hodgepodge of poll-tested items—Repeal Obamacare taxes! Eliminate the mandates! Block-grant Medicaid!—in search of a central, unifying theme.

Intelligibility also differentiates the AHCA from Obamacare. The latter rests on a host of faulty assumptions. It privileges technocratic tinkering over market forces. It assumes that a relatively modest penalty will induce healthy people to sign up for insurance. And so on. But once those assumptions are accepted, the scheme is somewhat coherent: Forcing

insurers to cover everybody increases premiums, but forcing everybody to carry insurance will lower them, and public subsidies will make it affordable for the middle class. The AHCA had no such internal logic.

Whether the GOP will return to Obamacare this year or even before the 2018 midterm election is not clear. For that matter, it is an open question of whether they *should*. The AHCA was such a poorly constructed piece of legislation that it raises doubts about the party's commitment to the project, and even its competence. It seems as though House Republicans have not put the time and effort into thinking through a sensible alternative to Obamacare. And if that is sadly the case, then perhaps they should just leave well enough alone. Passing a bad bill would be worse than doing nothing—for then the entire blame for the many problems of American health care would shift from the Democrats to the Republicans. That would embolden the progressive left, which is already revisiting the idea of single-payer health care with a gleam in its eye. ♦

Feel-Good Investing

Businesses might want to focus on profits?

Perish the thought. BY TONY MECIA

Picture in your mind, for a moment, the Monopoly man. You know, the guy in the Parker Brothers board game who has a top hat and white handlebar mustache. He makes his money in real estate and railroads. Think how he probably invested that money.

Now, imagine that Monopoly man has a grandson, a twentysomething hipster. How would you guess he invests the inherited fortune? Would he be content with maximizing

profits like his grandfather? Or would he strive to “make a difference” by channeling his money into renewable energy and Third World development?

Increasing numbers of people are taking that latter approach, which they consider modern and enlightened: investing in companies that strive to make the world a better place. That surge of interest is creating a cottage industry within the financial world. Financial companies are hiring specialists, crunching data, and creating more investment options aimed at those who consider themselves “socially responsible.”

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This approach goes by many different names, most commonly “sustainable” or “impact” investing. The tactics can vary. It can be as simple as refusing to invest in companies or sectors perceived to be poor corporate citizens, like tobacco companies or those that traffic in “conflict minerals.” Or it can be more complex, actively steering money to firms operating in poor countries, or in fields such as renewable energy and education, or that are woman-owned or meet other employee-diversity benchmarks. It is also known as applying “environmental, social and governance” (ESG) criteria.

This style of feel-good investing seems to be taking off, even in the Trump era. The overall market has surged roughly 10 percent since the election, but the new administration is promising to help old-line industries, many of which are out of favor with this new investor class. “Will Trump derail the ESG investing momentum?” one analyst with BlueBay Asset Management wondered in March in a research note. “He’s certainly influential, but perhaps ESG has now grown too big for Trump to tackle.” Now that’s big.

Assets under management using “sustainable, responsible, and impact” strategies have more than doubled since 2012, to \$8.7 trillion in 2016, according to US SIF, the trade group for sustainable investment. That’s more than one-fifth of the money under professional management in the United States. There are now more than 150 U.S. mutual funds that consider “environmental, social, or governance” criteria in selecting companies, according to Morningstar, a leading investment-research company.

In a free society, of course, people can spend and invest their money however they like. And there’s some entertainment value in watching social justice investors learn the economic realities of pouring money into woman-owned sub-Saharan wind farms. The effect, though, is much broader.

This new surge of interest in considering nonfinancial criteria in

investment decisions shows how politically minded people can apply yet another layer of pressure to U.S. corporations. Companies have always been sensitive to pushes from their customers. Now, though, these demands are emanating from the top down, from increasing numbers of institutional shareholders and potential investors. Odds are that other people’s politics are creeping into your portfolio, too.

The California Public Employees’ Retirement System voted to stop investing in tobacco stocks in 2002—and missed out on up to \$3 billion in returns through 2014, according to a consultant’s report last year.



Cigarette factory in Bulgaria

As you would expect, companies are rising to the challenge to prove their social responsibility bona fides to investors interested in such topics—and to the many new companies that have started up to judge and rate firms on the new metrics. Some 81 percent of S&P 500 companies published a corporate social responsibility report in 2015, four times the number just four years earlier, according to the Governance & Accountability Institute. This may simply be savvy public relations. Activists acknowledge the possibility that corporations are merely projecting an environmentally friendly image, known derisively as “greenwashing.”

For instance, if you were thinking twice about investing in a beer company because alcohol production doesn’t seem socially redeeming, AB InBev wants you to know that it is so much more than the maker of Budweiser and other international beers. According to its 45-page global citizenship report, “Growing Together for a Better World,” AB InBev builds soccer fields and helps villagers sell bamboo in China. It also refuels its delivery trucks in Argentina with an eco-friendly biodiesel derived from soybean oil. And that doesn’t even include the fine work the company is doing to help barley farmers and ensure clean water supplies worldwide.

As if these voluntary disclosures were not enough, some in the sustainable investing field are asking the Securities and Exchange Commission to adopt mandatory reporting requirements on ESG topics for public companies. That development, they say, would standardize reporting and help investors make better decisions about a company’s long-term viability.

The obvious question in all this is how do the returns of sustainable investing strategies stack up? How would Monopoly man’s returns compare with those of his status-conscious grandson? If this field can establish itself as having no financial downside while making a better world, it could really take off.

Logic would suggest that money invested with no restrictions would tend to outperform money invested with restrictions. Because many of the investment funds are so new, there are few studies comparing them with their unrestricted peers. One such study by the Global Impact Investing Network in 2015 found that private “impact” funds earned an average annual rate of return of 6.9 percent between 1998 and 2014, compared with an 8.1 percent return from funds with no restrictions. The difference can be greater if investors steer clear of entire economic sectors. Although it is possible to cherry-pick favorable data, average returns generally range from mildly worse to significantly worse.

Over the years, that's a risk some investors have been willing to take. Colleges risked returns in the 1980s by divesting in companies that did business in South Africa, just as their endowments are now likely to see lower returns by pulling investments in fossil fuels. The California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) voted to stop investing in tobacco stocks in 2002—and missed out on up to \$3 billion in returns through 2014, according to a consultant's report last year.

The debate over corporate responsibility goes back decades. Milton Friedman argued that the only responsibility of business is to act legally and ethically and to make money for its shareholders. The profit motive, he said in his 1962 classic, *Capitalism and Freedom*, ensures that society's resources are efficiently distributed. For corporations to embrace charitable, nonfinancial goals maligns profit-making, he said—a “suicidal impulse” that eases the way for government intervention.

He expanded on that view in the 1970 article “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits,” published, of all places, in the *New York Times Magazine*:

The businessmen believe that they are defending free enterprise when they declaim that business is not concerned “merely” with profit but also with promoting desirable “social” ends; that business has a “social conscience” and takes seriously its responsibilities for providing employment, eliminating discrimination, avoiding pollution and whatever else may be the catchwords of the contemporary crop of reformers. In fact they are—or would be if they or anyone else took them seriously—preaching pure and unadulterated socialism. Businessmen who talk this way are unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades.

It might be that the most “sustainable” path is for businesses to pursue profits unabashedly and for activists to stop using companies as vehicles to achieve political aims. ♦

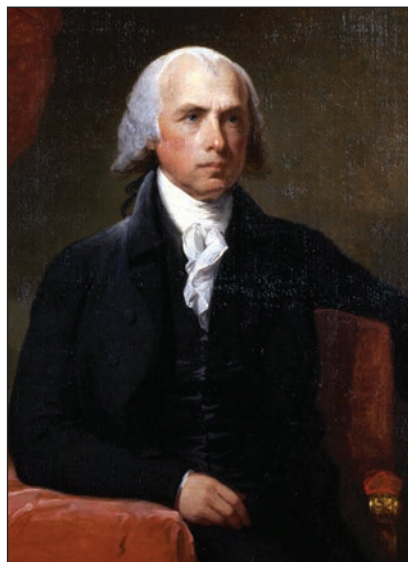
Giving Madison His Due

You probably don't know as much as he thought you should. **BY REBECCA BURGESS**

Read history: so learn your place in Time; / And go to sleep: all this was done before.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's somewhat sour sonnet comes to mind as a free-roaming commentary on any number of contemporary crises. These include a less-than-sober national media and a poorly grounded civic conversation about politics and the public.

*Our engines plunge into the seas, they climb
Above our atmosphere: we grow not more
Profound as we approach the ocean's floor;
Our flight is lofty, it is not sublime.*



James Madison, ‘Father of the Bill of Rights’

Last month saw the anniversary of the birth of James Madison, fourth president of the United States and a voracious reader of history who was

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acutely aware of his place in time. His own writing isn't read in our time as often as it's quoted in the media. That's because his body of work revolved around a project that earned him the sobriquet “Father of the Constitution,” and neither American history nor its constitutional debates are much taught in schools anymore. He was as well a premier statesman, which makes him seem too old-fashioned for current commentary—statesmanship no longer being the great ambition of the politician. For these reasons, as much as for the lack of a federal holiday and targeted shopping specials, Madison's birthday goes by barely noticed.

That's fine, in and of itself. Not every past president and Founding Father needs his own national holiday. More legitimately concerning is the ever-growing distance between the sophistication of our technological methods of communication and the poverty of our public discourse. We are marvelously up-to-date but hardly well-informed. This is especially true when it comes to our particular constitutional form of government: knowing the branches of government (legislative, executive, judicial), by whom their powers are to be exercised, and, crucially, *how* they are to be exercised.

Madison, in company with other statesmen of his generation, thought it particularly important—vital, actually—that a self-governing people be conversant in this kind of political talk. He famously summed this up in an 1822 letter to W. T. Barry:

A popular Government, without popular information, or the means

of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

Mere information about government (what now is often reduced to cries for “transparency!”) was only the baseline of what Madison had in mind. His intellectual dance around the issue of a bill of rights displays better how Madison connected popular opinion, political knowledge, and self-government premised on the preservation of rights (the first purpose of government, according to the Declaration of Independence). This is noteworthy, because Madison initially was not in favor of including a bill of rights in the Constitution—he believed that the Constitution was itself a bill of rights. Additionally, he was skeptical that a list of specified rights would have efficacy against actual abuses of those rights. It might only amount to a paper tiger, a “parchment barrier.” In other words (so to speak): They’re just words, words, words.

While Thomas Jefferson was in Paris during the first rumblings of the French Revolution, Madison wrote him, maintaining that when it came to ensuring the protection of rights, public opinion could be as much the offensive as the defensive guard. Madison was particularly concerned with the opinion of the vocal majority. He worried that because “the real power lies in the majority of the Community” in America, “the invasion of private rights is chiefly to be apprehended . . . from acts in which the Government is the mere instrument of the major number of the constituents.” This, he pointed out, was different from what Jefferson was noticing about France, where it was “acts of Government contrary to the sense of its constituents” that appeared problematic.

It was teasing out the role of public opinion over the course of corresponding with Jefferson that convinced Madison a bill of rights

added to the Constitution might serve an essential task. It could attract the favor of the sizable minority then cool or opposed to the Constitution, as well as firm up the favorable disposition of the more general opinion. A separate bill of rights could serve as the instrument by which Americans would become attached to the idea of the Constitution, and thus the type of government and society the Constitution meant to stimulate. And this deep and popular attachment would be the real protection against the public abuse of private rights. Madison believed the Constitution needed to be an extraordinary force in its own right in American political life.

How Madison implemented his ideas by shepherding the first

10 amendments to the Constitution—our Bill of Rights—through the first Congress and the state ratification process is a story of statecraft well executed as well as a tale of public opinion both respected and educated. Madison believed that despite the limitations of human nature and popular government, the vocal majority and public opinion were not condemned to wallow in their own prejudices and ignorance. The possibility of climbing out from under them—of a flight lofty and sublime—depends on knowing the proper facts and engaging with the “reflections suggested by them” by politicians and people alike. And it is the sustained reading of history that helps us recognize those facts and enriches our reflections on them. ♦

Defining Doctors Down

They should be professionals, not order-takers.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

There was a day in the not-too-distant past when physicians were respected, even revered, as learned *professionals*. We understood that doctors followed a “higher calling.” Indeed, physicians were expected to adhere to a code of conduct—epitomized by the Hippocratic Oath’s venerable injunction, “do no harm.”

Times have changed. The old hierarchies eroded and professional standards evolved accordingly. Some of this has obviously been for the better. For example, where doctors once made life-and-death treatment decisions, patients now may refuse care, e.g., no more tethering to medical machinery

when one simply wants to die naturally at home.

But many of the changes have been for the worse. The doctor’s role is increasingly that of a highly trained “service provider,” whose job is to provide the patient with data to make informed choices and then perform all requested procedures. In this deprofessionalized milieu, many within the medical and bioethics intelligentsia argue that a doctor’s moral judgment—“medical conscience,” as it is sometimes known—has no place at the bedside.

Since the legalization of abortion (and in some places assisted suicide), most conscience debates have focused on whether doctors can be forced to take human life. This contest is being waged in Canada, where the Supreme Court conjured a positive right to euthanasia—enacted into law

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by Parliament last year. In the wake of legalization, most provincial medical associations published ethics opinions requiring doctors to provide lethal interventions for every legally qualified patient upon request or, if morally opposed, refer the patient to a doctor they know to be willing. Whether that duty will be embedded into the law is currently being debated.

Here in the United States, a 2007 ethics opinion of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)—reaffirmed in 2016—invokes the term *conscience* while seeming not to know what it means:

Although respect for conscience is important, conscientious refusals should be limited if they constitute an imposition of religious and moral beliefs on patients. . . . Physicians and other healthcare providers have the duty to refer patients in a timely manner to other providers if they do not feel that they can in conscience provide the standard reproductive services that patients request.

If ACOG’s view were ever mandated legally, every obstetrician and gynecologist in America would be required to be complicit in terminating pregnancies. Victoria, Australia, has already imposed a legal duty to abort-or-refer on all of its licensed doctors. Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union has launched a campaign of litigation against Catholic hospitals that adhere to the church’s moral teachings, shopping for that one judge willing to shatter the religious freedom of church-affiliated health care institutions.

A push is also on to restrict conscience in less contentious fields of practice. The internationally influential *Journal of Medical Ethics* has published bioethicist Francesca Minerva pushing the logic of doctors-as-order-takers to its conclusion. Using examples of people who had horns surgically implanted in foreheads and feminists who wanted their bodies “uglified” as an ideological statement, Minerva makes the absolutist claim that a doctor’s job requires doing precisely what the patient wants:

If doctors make a conscientious objection to perform cosmetic surgery for

artistic, whimsical, or political reasons on the sole ground that such interventions do not match the traditional goals of cosmetic surgery, they impose their own idea of what medicine is supposed to achieve. . . . Doctors have at least a prima facie obligation to perform treatments their patients request, even when they do not agree with the goals of the patients, their lifestyle, their idea of what is in their best interest and their values.

Think what this could mean. Doctors could be forced to participate in body mutilations that have nothing to do with treating disease or promoting

similarly be required to participate in treatments for gender dysphoria, including sex change surgeries, regardless of their moral or religious views, forced to cooperate with self-cutters in harming themselves (that has been proposed seriously as a proper clinical response to the condition), and perhaps even compelled to wound as a means of protecting the patient from infection or more serious self-inflicted injuries.

And what about those unfortunate people who suffer from body integrity identity disorder, also



You shouldn't lose your job because of your morals.

Neither should your doctor.

Everyone has the right to live their lives according to their moral convictions. This means doctors too. The possible legalization of euthanasia puts doctors in a difficult position. Many cannot assist in a patient's death because of their professional, moral or ethical commitments. There are plans in place that would make it impossible for these doctors to maintain their integrity on this and other issues.

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An online appeal by the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition

wellness, such as the radical modifications undertaken by the late “Stalking Cat,” who had whiskers implanted to look feline (before committing suicide), or the “Dragon Lady,” a transgendered woman who has had her ears and nose cut off to look reptilian.

More ominously, doctors could be required to perform female genital mutilation. Minerva seeks to avoid this obvious consequence by blithely noting the practice is often outlawed. But that’s a dodge. FGM isn’t universally prohibited. Moreover, if patient desires are truly paramount—if “patient rights” are always to prevail over a doctor’s moral judgments—and the woman seeking the procedure believes it is a religious duty, on what logical basis could society outlaw FGM for consenting adults or doctors refuse to fulfill such requests?

If doctors are to be just technocratic service providers, they could

known as body dysphoria, in which the patient identifies as disabled and wants to have a healthy limb amputated or spinal cord severed to become paralyzed? Don’t think that couldn’t happen. Browse the bioethics literature and you will find arguments that acceding to such intense patient desires should be deemed an appropriate treatment for the condition. Should a physician’s refusal to amputate come to be seen as a moral judgment rather than being strictly medical, what basis would there be for refusing to lop off healthy arms on request?

Time to hit the brakes. Allowing conscientious refusal to provide procedures not required to maintain life both protects doctors from authoritarian impositions and shields patients from harm. Honoring medical conscience also furthers social cohesion and promotes the general welfare by

defending against destructive behaviors while maintaining the role of the doctor as healer rather than killer or enabler of dysfunction.

Beyond that, depriving doctors of moral agency would be harmful to the health care system as a whole. Not only would coercing doctors to provide elective procedures with which they disagree drive some of our best

physicians into early retirement, such a policy would surely dissuade many talented students from entering the medical field in the first place.

This much is sure: We are all better off with doctors empowered to exercise moral judgment as professionals rather than being reduced to technicians obliged to perform any legal procedure a patient can afford. ♦

Time to Fix Fannie and Freddie

How tax reform could hasten housing-finance reform. **BY IKE BRANNON**

Comprehensive tax reform, done right, would accomplish many things: It should boost investment, productivity, and employment, and along with these economic growth. That is the intent, anyway.

But tax reform could affect the housing market as well, in a way that may prompt Congress to address that market's current stasis. It isn't clear whether that would be a good thing.

To understand the connection between tax reform and the housing market you have to understand how U.S. mortgage financing works. Most mortgages issued by banks or mortgage companies do not remain with the issuer. Instead the bank sells them (more precisely, it sells the right to receive monthly payments from the borrower, with the house as collateral) to either Fannie Mae and

Freddie Mac, two government-sponsored enterprises (GSE).

Fannie and Freddie bundle mortgages together and sell the bundles



Well, she does have a point.

to investors in the form of mortgage-backed securities. The value added by Fannie and Freddie is that they do due diligence on the mortgages to ensure they meet certain standards and then offer a guarantee to the buyers of the securities that the borrowers won't default.

But the GSEs have an unfortunate

history of not being as diligent as advertised. When the housing collapse hit in 2008, the GSEs held hundreds of billions of dollars of mortgages of dubious value. The government declared Fannie and Freddie insolvent and placed them into what it labeled a conservatorship. It injected over \$100 billion of capital into the two and assumed ownership of just under 80 percent of each entity. In exchange for the capital it put into them it also assigned itself an annual dividend equal to 10 percent of its investment in each. The existing shareholders retained their interest in the remaining 20 percent of the company, at least theoretically.

After a few years the housing market recovered, and the assets held by the GSEs recovered their value. Suddenly, Fannie and Freddie began making enormous profits: In 2012 alone, their combined profits exceeded \$130 billion.

Those profits gave the Obama administration an idea—why not use that money to reduce the reported

government deficit before the election? In 2012 the Treasury issued the “third amendment” to the legislation that created the conservatorship, sweeping the entire net worth of each entity into the Treasury's coffers at the end of each quarter. The owners of the other 20 percent of the GSEs effectively saw their investments wiped out. The government has thereby recovered its entire investment in the GSEs and earned a tidy profit to boot.

The “sweep” created two problems. The first is that it is not clear that the maneuver is legal, a question currently being litigated. The second, and more immediate, problem is that the sweep leaves the two GSEs undercapitalized. The undercapitalization is problematic because it could hasten another day of reckoning.

And this is where tax reform comes in.

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Fannie and Freddie reported sizeable losses in the years before the sweep, totaling just over \$150 billion. Those losses have been carried forward to reduce tax obligations in future years, whenever they are allowed to keep their profits. Under the current corporate tax rate of 35 percent, these will reduce future tax bills by \$53 billion.

However, a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 20 percent—the rate specified in the Paul Ryan/ Kevin Brady “Better Way” tax reform plan—would reduce the value of these “deferred tax assets” to \$30 billion.

While losing \$23 billion in future tax relief might seem like nothing more than an accounting issue, its implications are anything but: Unless the GSEs’ profits exceed the reduction in the value of the deferred tax assets in the quarter that tax reform passes (which isn’t likely), then the GSEs will need money from the Treasury—i.e., taxpayers—to keep operating.

The optics of such an outcome are

terrible. The Obama administration ignored the problems inherent in the current status of the GSEs because of the enormous profits they were pouring into Treasury’s coffers (and because Obamaites were busy telling Americans they had fixed the financial markets). When voters see that Fannie and Freddie are again costing the government money, the political urgency to remedy their status may grow exponentially.

The worry is that this easily foreseeable occurrence may nonetheless trigger an urgent effort by Congress and the Treasury to “fix” the undercapitalized GSEs immediately, and in their haste they may arrive at an inferior solution.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac’s status *should* be resolved as soon as possible: Keeping them in a state of limbo has contributed to a moribund housing market that has been a drag on the U.S. economy for years. Annual housing starts from 2009-2016 were a fraction of what they had been in

the years before the Great Recession. One must hark back to the Johnson administration, when there were half as many households in the United States as there are today, to find a period when housing starts outside of a recession were as low as they have been in the last seven years.

Much better would be for Treasury and Congress to make reforming the housing finance system a priority and come up with some long-run solutions that would help fix the stagnant housing market. This may be wishful thinking—a sage politician once remarked that there is no political gain in solving a problem until everyone realizes that it is a problem, and few people perceive the current status of the GSEs as a problem.

Consider this an attempt to clarify that perception. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac’s constrained, ambiguous status contributes to a growing housing shortage while putting the brakes on economic growth. It needs to be resolved as soon as possible. ♦

A Historic Moment for U.S. Energy

THOMAS J. DONOHUE

PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Thanks to a sweeping new executive order last week, the United States took a large and long-overdue step toward achieving energy independence. President Trump declared the promotion of U.S. energy resources a strategic national objective; ordered a review of all energy regulations, including the EPA’s Clean Power Plan (CPP); and reversed multiple other misguided Obama-era policies restricting our energy sector. Together these actions will unleash domestic energy production and support large-scale economic growth and job creation.

America has a diverse and unparalleled supply of energy resources, giving us a massive economic advantage over other nations. The previous administration chose to restrict access to these resources under the guise of protecting the environment—even though many of its measures

would have done little to advance this goal, instead merely shifting jobs and growth to other countries. The Trump administration’s actions last week reflect an understanding that the environment and the economy do not need to be at odds. America’s energy innovators are able to safely and cleanly leverage our resources when government supports, rather than opposes, their efforts.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has led the fight against many of the restrictive Obama-era regulations that will be reviewed or rescinded under President Trump’s order, including the CPP. The plan is the poster child of ill-advised regulations, aiming to radically transform the electricity sector through rules that impose tens of billions of dollars in costs on businesses and consumers. That is why more than 160 challengers took legal action against EPA to block the CPP, including 28 states and a Chamber-led coalition of 16 national business groups.

The Chamber is confident that

the Trump administration’s review of the CPP will reveal the plan’s damaging impact and result in it being fully rescinded. We also expect that the administration’s stated goal of identifying “all regulations, all rules, all policies ... that serve as obstacles and impediments to American energy independence” will lead to additional badly needed policy reversals in the federal agencies.

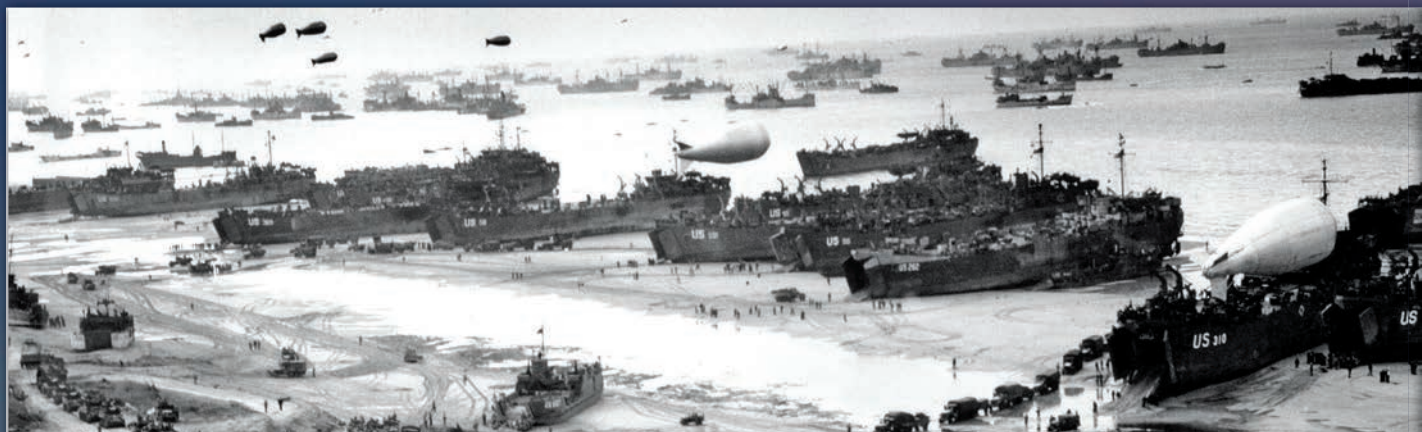
All the measures included in the executive order represent a long-awaited realignment of the federal government’s approach to the energy sector. Our nation’s natural resources belong to the American people, and it’s up to our free enterprise economy to convert these resources not only into energy but into jobs, growth, and prosperity for all. The Chamber is prepared to help the administration and Congress continue to advance this mission in the months and years to come.



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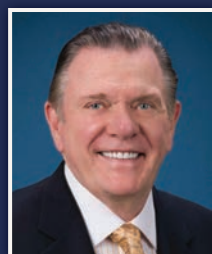


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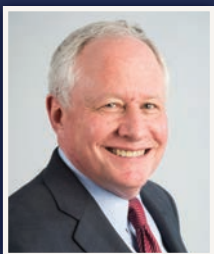
Daniel Hannan is a writer and a columnist for the *Washington Examiner*. After 17 years as a Member of the European Parliament, campaigning for British withdrawal from the EU, he succeeded in abolishing his job in the Brexit referendum on June 23, 2016. He is the author of nine books, including *New York Times* bestseller *Inventing Freedom: How the English-Speaking Peoples Made the Modern World*, and *Sunday Times* bestseller *Vote Leave*.

His latest book is ***What Next: How to Get the Best from Brexit***.

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Troubled Seoul

The turmoil in Korea

By ETHAN EPSTEIN

Seoul

It was probably not the most traumatic moment of Park Geun-hye's life. In 1974, after all, Park's mother, then the first lady of South Korea, was assassinated by a North Korea sympathizer in a crowded Seoul theater. Only five years later, her father, the long-ruling dictator Park Chung-hee, was offed by his own spy chief after a banquet in central Seoul.

But Park Geun-hye's appearance at the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office on March 21 was nonetheless a watershed moment for a woman who has spent most of her 65 years in and around the corridors of power. She was the first daughter of South Korea and after her mother's murder officially deemed the country's first lady. Later, she served as a conservative member of the National Assembly, before being elected president of this nation of 50 million in 2012.

A small cohort of defenders massed in front of the prosecutors' office to show their support for the former president as she faced interrogation over the bribery scandal that led to her impeachment last December. Park flashed a grim look and said she was "sorry to the people" before enduring some 14 hours of questioning. Her presidential immunity now stripped, there's a good chance that Madame Park will have gone from living in Korea's presidential residence, the Blue House, to moving into the Big House: Prosecutors are bringing serious charges against her. And the candidate most likely to succeed her as president has indicated that there will be no presidential pardon.

South Korea has been officially president-less since December 9, when the National Assembly voted for Park's impeachment. She was immediately suspended from office—though allowed to remain in the



Park Geun-hye, left, at the prosecutors' office, March 20; Choi Soon-sil, right, in court, January 5



Blue House—while the Constitutional Court deliberated whether to accept the National Assembly's decision. (The country's prime minister assumed presidential duties following Park's impeachment, though, appropriately, he has treated this largely as a caretaker role.) In early March, the unanimous decision came down: Park was out. A new president will be elected May 9.

Park needed to go, but South Koreans sure picked an awfully inconvenient time to not have a president. As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump delighted in bashing South Korea, claiming that the close U.S. ally doesn't pay enough for the presence of U.S. forces in the country. (Though the numbers have fallen slightly, more than 28,000 U.S. servicemen are still stationed here, guarding against North Korean invasion.) Trump also bemoaned South Korea's industrial policies, lamenting, for example, that Korea has become a powerhouse for television manufacturing, a business that all but dried up in the United States a generation ago.

Trump said similar things about Japan, which is why that country's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, has gone out of his way to deftly cultivate the new president. Recognizing—and satisfying—Trump's craving for flattery, Abe was the first foreign leader to personally congratulate Trump on his victory, and he quickly sent over a \$3,755 golf club as a gift. (At this point, it's a wonder Abe hasn't bought a condo in Trump Tower.)

Abe's actions have borne fruit: Not only did he get a free weekend at Mar-a-Lago out of the deal, but when North Korea test-fired a missile during Abe's U.S. visit, Trump's statement mentioned only North Korea's threat to Japan—not the threat to South Korea. In the zero-sum world of East Asian politics, Japan's diplomatic wins can't help but look like losses for South Korea. Unfortunately, the South Koreans haven't had a president to try the Abe approach on Trump, and they've fallen behind because of it.

That's not to say that were she still in office, Park

Ethan Epstein is associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

LEFT, LEE YOUNG-HO / BLOOMBERG / GETTY; RIGHT, CHUNG SUNG-JUN / GETTY

Geun-hye would be successfully cozying up to Trump. As the scandal that felled her has shown, she was not much of a political leader.

Park's downfall began last October, when news surfaced of the president's bizarrely close relationship with a lifelong female friend, Choi Soon-sil. Choi, despite having no official role in government or even a security clearance, had Rasputin-like levels of influence over Park. She edited the president's speeches; told her what to wear; dictated orders to Park's official aides. Choi had access to at least 47 confidential government documents.

Choi's father also had a long-standing relationship with Park. He was a religious flim-flam man, dubbed a "pseudo-pastor" by his own country's CIA, who initially got close to Park by telling her that her dead mother had appeared in his dreams. Like father, like daughter: According to various reports, the younger Choi is also a self-styled "shaman fortuneteller" who acted the part of Park's puppeteer.

Park's relationship with the Chois was unusual, to be sure—and indeed, there are longstanding rumors here that the president secretly gave birth to a child by Ms. Choi's father. But the relations appear to have been criminal as well. Leveraging her close connections with the president, Choi, working in league with several of the president's aides, allegedly extorted around \$60 million from South Korea's *chaebol*—the massive conglomerates that dominate the economy here. The scandal has felled Samsung's chief, who was arrested in February for paying nearly \$40 million in bribes to Choi. Choi herself is also facing prosecution. And former president Park was arrested on March 31, on suspicion of bribery and abuse of authority, among other charges.

In response to the scandal, South Koreans did what they do best, a skill they've been perfecting since the 1980s pro-democracy movement: They demonstrated. Week in, week out throughout the autumn, hundreds of thousands of people packed central Seoul, calling for Park's ouster. The marches were festive, almost party-like, according to people who participated, and drew many who had theretofore been largely apolitical. By early December, the crowds had reached monumental proportions, with nearly two million demonstrators taking to the streets nationwide

on December 3—a remarkable display of civic activism in a country with only a brief history of democracy. (The first free elections here were held in 1987). Surveys showed Park's approval rating sliding to 4 percent (that's not a typo). The writing was on the wall, and the National Assembly impeached her.

It was obvious when I followed Park on the campaign trail in 2012 that she was not a natural politician. She was unflinchingly wooden on the stump—I saw her deliver the same exact speech several times consecutively, with nary a variation for location, timing, etc. At one point during that day, a fleet of buses drove in front of the podium she was speaking from, drowning her out. Yet she stuck to her script and kept talking, even though nobody could hear her. Not a natural.

Even so, the extent of her political incompetence is shocking. At the outset of the scandal, Park appears to have lied, telling the nation that she merely sought advice on speeches and public relations from Choi. Throughout her downfall, she essentially refused to apologize, offering half-baked statements of regret. And she has looked laughably out of touch, cloistered in the Blue House: As the protests swelled, in one Trumpian moment, Park hilariously suggested that there

might have been twice as many demonstrators supporting her as there were marching against her.

Park even managed to mess up leaving office after her impeachment was confirmed. It took Park a full two days to vacate the Blue House after the Constitutional Court rendered its decision. (A government source tells me that Park had received bad intelligence that the Court would rule in her favor, so had made no preparations to move.) And when she did finally go, she left her nine dogs behind, spurring claims she had violated a South Korean law targeting pet abandonment.

North Korean media have delighted in Park's downfall, celebrating first the demonstrations in Seoul and then her impeachment. That they were inadvertently promoting democracy by showing South Koreans exercising rights that North Koreans are denied seems to have been lost on Pyongyang's crack editors. The



A portion of massive protests in Seoul against Park Geun-hye, December 3, 2016

North Korean regime detested some of the actions Park took, most notably shuttering the Kaesong Industrial Zone, a ridiculous vestige of Kim Dae-jung's turn-of-the-millennium "Sunshine Policy," whereby South Korean companies paid North Korean workers to assemble products. Needless to say, most of the "salaries" paid to the workers were funneled directly to the North Korean regime.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un is proving to be different from, even worse than his late father, Kim Jong-il. It's not just that the young dauphin has rapidly moved ahead with his country's missile and nuclear weapons programs while undertaking a vicious set of purges at home. Nor is it only the brazen assassination of Kim Jong-un's half-brother in a crowded Malaysian airport, ordered by the regime and committed with an internationally banned chemical weapon. He seems as well to have a different view of the purpose of his nuclear program than his father did.

Kim Jong-il, and Kim Il-sung before him, dreamed of nuclear weapons as a deterrent, the one way to ensure the survival of their brutal hereditary regime. This is why it never made any sense to cut "deals" with Pyongyang, in which the international community would bribe the North into abandoning its nuclear program. This was the basic outline of the Clinton administration's 1994 Agreed Framework. But it was ludicrous wishful thinking, as that sorry episode showed. For the Kim regime, nukes have always been non-negotiable; they were seen as the only way to prevent a U.S.-led invasion. They'll only give them up if they have no other choice.

Kim Jong-un, by contrast, appears to take a rather more expansive view of what his arsenal can achieve. As the astute Korea-watcher B.R. Myers noted last year, under Kim Jong-un's leadership, Pyongyang's propaganda has increasingly touted "autonomous unification," a term that "has always stood for the conquest or subjugation of South Korea after nullification or removal of the U.S. military presence." Myers further reports that Kim has been promoting "final victory" in addresses to North Korea's military. This is alarming, for Kim's vision of "final victory" is a unified Korea—under his dictatorship.

The present moment is therefore deeply troubling, even if life in Seoul, some 35 miles from the border, continues at its typically frenetic, amped-up, *soju*-fueled pace. It's a time of maximum peril—and one that Barack Obama's administration did little to forestall. When it came to North Korea, Obama sat on his hands for eight years, though he gussied up this lack of action by giving it a fancy name and pretending it was a policy: "strategic patience." Then he passed off the problem like a hot potato. When Trump took office, Obama reportedly told the new president that North Korea was the gravest threat he would face.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, on a visit to Seoul in

mid-March, stated the obvious: "Strategic patience" had failed. He indicated that the United States was interested in pursuing many options to halt the North's maniacal pursuit of nuclear weapons, hinting that military action was a distinct possibility. The usual suspects—legions of newspaper columnists, think tank denizens, and Twittering pundits, who, ignoring history, continue to promote "engagement" with the North Korean regime—reacted with predictable horror.

But Kim Han-kwon, a China expert at Korea's National Diplomatic Academy, suggests to me that Tillerson's strong talk was aimed more at Beijing than Pyongyang. China is loath to see a military strike on North Korea, fearing it might bring down the regime or start a war. Tillerson's calculation, Kim suggests, is that threatening such an action will lead Beijing finally to take serious steps of its own to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear program. Cutting off energy aid could be key, such a threat to its survival that the North Korean regime could possibly be coerced to disarm.

That would take a big shift from Beijing, however, which has lately been targeting the wrong Korea.

Last July, the United States and South Korea announced plans to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, in a bid to protect U.S. troops and South Koreans from North Korean missiles.

Beijing—claiming spuriously that the system will be used to spy on China—has reacted ferociously. Beijing has banned South Korean celebrities from entering China, where they're wildly popular, barred Korean movies from Chinese cinemas, and closed more than 50 Lotte department stores in China, citing "fire safety"—perhaps the only time in recorded history that the Chinese regime has taken safety regulations seriously. (Lotte, a Korean *chaebol*, had recently ceded a golf course it owns to the Korean government to use as a THAAD staging ground—surely a coincidence.) In mid-March, the Beijing regime banned Chinese group tours to Korea, a tough blow given that nearly half of the foreign tourists to South Korea hail from China. Indeed, whole shopping districts in Seoul have in recent years reconfigured themselves to appeal to Chinese tastes; one of them, Myeongdong, was utterly devoid of shoppers, Chinese or otherwise, on a recent afternoon.

The most profound division in Korea is the DMZ, a man-made abomination that since 1953 has cleaved a country that was unified for thousands of years in two. But South Korean society is deeply split as well: between young and old, rich and poor, rural and urban. On the electoral level, broadly speaking, the divisions mirror those in the West: The old tend to vote conservative, the young lean more liberal. Increased educational attainment seems to correlate with moving leftward

as well. Professor Jung Kim, an expert on South Korean domestic politics at the University of North Korean Studies, tells me that the poor tend to be the most conservative voters in South Korea—though poverty is correlated with increased age.

Yet there are also stark divisions here that owe to South Korea's particular history. The area around Gwangju, for example, the sixth-largest city in the country, situated in the southwest of the peninsula, tends to vote heavily left-wing. That's in large part a vestige of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, when South Korea's then-military government killed hundreds of pro-democracy protesters. After the transition to democracy, those associated with the military governments tended to move into the conservative political parties, and dyed-in-the-wool democrats moved left. Indeed, it's unfortunate that even today, some South Korean conservatives have had a hard time adjusting to governing democratically. Park Geun-hye was no exception: Her aides drew up a "blacklist" of writers and artists who were hostile to her administration and banned them from receiving government funds. (This manifestly anti-democratic action resulted in the arrest of her culture minister.) And she led a failed effort to overhaul South Korean school textbooks, in a way, critics said, that glorified her dictator dad. The divisions in Korea, then, aren't just typical left-right fights: They also reflect latent attitudes about democracy and dictatorship.

Park's dead-end supporters—they're almost uniformly older and have fond memories of her father, who, despite human rights abuses, did preside over a remarkable period of economic growth—maintain that she was brought down in a left-wing coup. At an encampment outside Seoul city hall, they hold signs proclaiming that Park was impeached as part of a "Communist plot." But the opposition to her is just as acid. Friends of mine in Seoul—they tend to be younger, well-educated, cosmopolitan—berate Park as nothing more than the "dictator's daughter," a nonentity who was elected only because of the accident of her birth.

Those attitudes look set to carry the day when South Koreans vote for a new president in early May. Left-wing candidate Moon Jae-in—who narrowly lost the 2012 race to Park—is far ahead in many polls. Park messed things up so badly in office that her party has split in two; renegade conservative lawmakers bolted and have created a new conservative party, the Bareun. Park's old party, meanwhile, Saenuri, has opted for a rebranding: It's now calling itself the Liberty Korea party. There's also a centrist candidate in the mix drawing double-digit support.

All in all, the split field is redounding to Moon's benefit mightily: He's tipped to sail into office, even if he manages something like 35 percent of the vote. (The winner of the plurality vote will take the presidency—there's no runoff.) Perhaps surprisingly, North Korea's and China's provocations have not been an electoral boon for national-security-oriented conservatives. Professor Jung Kim suggests that's because attitudes towards North Korea are already baked in the cake: Barring an actual missile strike on Seoul, he says, nothing North Korea does will affect the electorate. The South Korean electorate may be unique in that increasing threats do not necessarily push voters to the right.

Moon's victory could portend bad times for the U.S.-Korea alliance. "I am personally worrying about the opposition party's view of national security based on the anti-Americanism, North Korea-friendly policies, and an [attempt] to change [the] Korea-U.S. alliance," says Oh Yong-hee, the secretary general of the International Relations Bureau at the Liberty Korea party. He has reason to worry: In December, Moon said he would seek to visit Pyongyang before Washington, a sign of where his priorities lie. A government official here, perhaps realizing that he would soon be serving a President Moon, dutifully tried to spin his remarks to me, claiming that "Moon meant he would check with Washington first."

Moon has also vowed to reevaluate the THAAD deployment, though people here think there's little chance he'll scuttle the system, which is already being installed.

One thing is certain: Moon will pursue warmer relations with North Korea and China. And he'll have widespread public support for the latter, given that China exerts great economic power over its smaller neighbor. Objectively speaking, South Korea is not a small country—at 50 million people strong, it's only a little less populous than South Africa—but sandwiched between Japan and China, it feels like one to them. The urge to tilt towards China will be profound.

In the months and years ahead, there's a danger—though it's far from a foregone conclusion—that South Korea could join the likes of the Philippines and drift away from its historic ally in Washington and towards China. That would be a true shame. South Korea is a jewel: a beacon of democracy surrounded by dictatorships; a loyal friend to the United States; and a nation of strivers that built an innovative, prosperous, and free country out of the ashes of the Korean War. Yet there's a disturbing possibility that we could find ourselves asking, just a few years from now, Who lost Korea? ♦



Ready and waiting: liberal favorite Moon Jae-in, December 10, 2016

Untied Kingdom

Will Brexit break Great Britain?

BY DOMINIC GREEN

On Wednesday, March 29, Theresa May formally invoked Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty and notified the European Council of Britain's intention to withdraw from the European Union. The treaty requires its signatories to complete withdrawal negotiations within two years. That gives Britain and the 27 other EU states until March 29, 2019, to unpick 41 years of treaties and arrive at an amicable separation.

EU law stipulates that the divorce agreement be approved by at least 20 member states, containing at least 65 percent of the EU's population, and ratified by the EU parliament. If no agreement is reached after two years, the extension of negotiations requires the consent of all 28 states. If there is no consensus, then Britain could leave without an agreement.

Not that the British agreed about leaving in the first place. In the nationwide referendum of June 2016, 51.8 percent of Britons voted for Brexit and 48.2 percent to Remain. But the British nation is really four nations. And two of them want to Remain. The English voted for Brexit by 53.4 to 46.6 percent, and the Welsh voted for Brexit by 52.5 to 47.5 percent. But the Scots voted to Remain by 62 to 38 percent, and the people of Northern Ireland voted to Remain by 55.8 to 44.2 percent.

A national vote on Britain's common future has exposed deep differences of opinion not just on the future of British policy, but on the future of the British polity. On Tuesday night, hours before Prime Minister May triggered Article 50, the Scottish Parliament endorsed a bill for a referendum on independence. Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister and leader of the Scottish National

London

party, wants to hold that referendum in late 2018 or early 2019, before the terms of Brexit have been finalized. Will Scotland exit Britain when Britain exits the EU?

A pause for some history and geography. The British Isles is the geographical name for the large island of Great Britain, the smaller island of Ireland, and a host of even smaller islands largely inhabited by fishermen, sheep, and tax exiles. The island of Great Britain is divided among the countries of England, Wales, and Scotland.

In 1543, Henry VIII subordinated Wales to England.

In 1603, James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne from his cousin Elizabeth I. As James I of England, he joined the crown of Scotland to those of England and Ireland, but the English Parliament, fearing Scottish rule, refused to accept union with Scotland. In 1707, the English, abetted by the Scottish nobility, imposed the Act of Union on the Scots, forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

The English and Scots already ruled Ireland, but the English only incorporated Ireland into the union in 1801, to dissuade the Irish from rebelling for Napoleon. In 1916, the Irish

rebelled against the English. In 1921, the island of Ireland was partitioned. Most of it became an independent Irish state. The six Protestant-dominated counties of northeastern Ireland went with Great Britain. Since then, the British polity has been called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the British Isles have contained four peoples in five states.

Many Americans call the U.K. of GB and NI "England." This infuriates many non-English members of the U.K. and is a source of quiet satisfaction to many of the English. Americans call the U.K. "England" because English is the common language of the British Isles. That is because the English forced the others to speak it. Before



Dominic Green, a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, is a frequent contributor.

the British Empire spread all over the world, the English Empire spread over the British Isles. The Scots and the Irish have not forgotten the expulsions and expropriations, and the sieges and starvations, on which the English Empire was built.

The United Kingdom arose over centuries. It appears to be slowly disintegrating, in the final unraveling of empire. The union began when Elizabeth I was in her first decade. If Nicola Sturgeon has her way, the U.K. will end when Elizabeth II is in her tenth decade.

In Britain, only politicians and the queen talk about the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Everyone else, including military personnel, identifies as a member of one of the four nations, or even an inhabitant of their home city. Sport, like politics, is local too.

The U.K. competes collectively in the Olympics as “Team GB.” Occasionally, a collective rugby team called the British and Irish Lions makes a drinking tour of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. But in every other sporting endeavor, the national teams kick lumps out of each other before baying mobs of supporters. And while the two Irish states field two soccer teams, one for the Republic and the other for Northern Ireland, they have always fielded one rugby team.

Legally, the Six Counties of Northern Ireland are as much a part of the United Kingdom as the garden of Buckingham Palace. But geography, family ties, and the threat of IRA terrorism have slowly drawn the Six Counties back to Ireland. The separation between the Irish republic and Northern Ireland was never total. The two states remained linked by family and economy. For years, the only motorway on the island of Ireland linked the Irish capital, Dublin, with the Northern Irish capital, Belfast. The border remained open, if heavily policed, even during the Troubles, when the IRA used the Republic as a base for attacks in the North.

Since the ending of the Troubles in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, ties between the two Irish states have thickened. The agreement devolved power from Westminster to Belfast and identified areas of common sovereignty between the Republic and the North. And while the Irish government recognized Northern Ireland as part of the U.K. for the first time, the U.K. government accepted terms for ceding Northern Ireland to the Republic. The

1998 agreement established that Northern Ireland will remain British until a majority of people in both the Republic and the North want a united Ireland.

That was before Brexit. Now, the two Irish states face the prospect of a strictly policed border between the EU territory of the Republic and the non-EU territory of Northern Ireland—despite the people of Northern Ireland having voted to Remain. In March, pro-republican voters expressed their anger in Northern Ireland’s elections. The Catholic nationalists of Sinn Fein—historically the political wing of the IRA—won 27 seats, only 1 fewer than the Protestant and pro-British Democratic Unionists. Two days before Theresa May invoked Article 50, Sinn Fein walked out of talks for creating the “power-sharing” government required by the Good Friday Agreement.

“Brexit will be a disaster for the economy, and a disaster for the people of Ireland,” Michelle O’Neill, Sinn Fein’s newly elected leader, announced in mid-March. “A referendum on Irish unity has to happen as soon as possible.”

In the most recent poll, taken September 2016, only 22 percent of the Northern Irish wanted to join the Republic. Yet in June 2016, 55.8 percent of the Northern Irish voted to stay in the EU. May wants to negotiate an open border between Brexit Britain and EU Ireland. If she fails, then the Northern Irish can only retain the perceived advantages of EU membership if they join the Irish

republic. And the Good Friday Agreement makes provision for an Irish referendum.

The Good Friday Agreement was only one element of Tony Blair’s program for devolving power to the Irish, Scots, and Welsh. In 1999, a year after the Northern Ireland Assembly opened, the Scots convened their first Parliament since 1707. The National Assembly for Wales created in 1998 was that country’s first national parliament.

Labour won votes in the 1997 election with a manifesto of commitment to devolution. But devolution, apart from harming the integrity of the U.K., has harmed Labour too, and especially in Scotland. When Prime Minister Blair and his successor Gordon Brown turned Labour into a London-fixed, welfare-cutting centrist party, they undermined the Scottish Labour party. This allowed the Scottish National party to position itself as the defender of Scotland’s welfare

The United Kingdom arose over centuries. It appears to be slowly disintegrating, in the final unraveling of empire.



Protester in Edinburgh, June 28, 2016

state against the southern capitalists—and to use the new Scottish Parliament to prove that the “Scots Nats” could be more than a party of historical grievance.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, the Scottish National party struggled to win, at most, a third of Scottish votes. In the 2007 elections, however, they won 47 seats in the Scottish Parliament, 1 more than Scottish Labour. Their leader Alex Salmond became first minister of Scotland. In the 2011 election, the Scots Nats campaigned for a referendum on Scottish independence and won a majority in the assembly. In the referendum of September 2014, Scottish voters decided to remain in the U.K., by 55.3 to 44.7 percent.

Again, that was before Brexit. In 2014, David Cameron’s government included a clause in regulations for the Scottish referendum that permitted a second referendum if circumstances changed. Brexit is that change: The Scots, like the Northern Irish, are leaving the EU against their will.

Since June 2016’s Brexit vote, Salmond’s successor Nicola Sturgeon has been calling for a second referendum. She has also attempted to gather support among the national governments of the EU member states and the EU government in Brussels for the entry into the EU of an independent Scotland. The diplomatic overtures have failed: The Spanish government, troubled by its own Catalan independence movement, was particularly blunt in its insistence that Scotland’s status would not be on the table until the completion of Brexit negotiations.

The economic winds are against Sturgeon. Over the last year, the Scottish economy has grown by 0.7 percent, while the overall U.K. economy has grown by 2.4 percent. In the fiscal year 2016-17, Scotland ran up a deficit of £13 billion (\$16.3 billion). In mid-March, a report concluded that the deficit is expected to be at least £11 billion for the next four fiscal years. To make up this deficit, an independent Scotland would have to impose massive tax increases and severe cuts to public services, and borrow heavily too.

In this uncertain climate, Scottish voters are losing their enthusiasm for independence. At the time of the Brexit referendum in June 2016, 47 percent of Scots wished to leave the U.K. and 41 percent wished to remain. Now, only 37 percent wish to leave the U.K. and 48 percent wish to remain.

Still, Sturgeon’s party is impregnable in the Edinburgh Parliament, with 63 seats to the Conservatives’ 31 and Labour’s 24. It remains the voice of Scotland in the London Parliament too, with 56 of the 59 Scottish seats. One

day, English schoolchildren may be told that the charge of the Royal Scots Greys at Waterloo was not one of the glories of British history, but an intervention by a foreign army, like the late arrival of the Prussians. Once again, everything depends on whether Theresa May can achieve the right Brexit deal.

Down south, it’s a different story. In June 2016, the voters in England and Wales overruled Prime Minister David Cameron, his chancellor George Osborne, and Mark Carney, the head of the Bank of England. All predicted economic disaster if the U.K. voted for Brexit. The pound would collapse, house prices would fall, and unemployment and inflation would rise. Yet the worst has failed to happen.

Admittedly, inflation has risen to 2.3 percent, its highest rate in three and a half years. Also, the pound dropped sharply after the Brexit referendum, and is still down some 15 percent against the U.S. dollar and 10 percent against the euro. But Britain’s unemployment rate is 4.8 percent, the lowest in 11 years. House price increases have slowed slightly, but are still at 7.4 percent a year. The British economy grew 1.8 percent in 2016; among G7 economies, only Germany’s, with 1.9 percent growth, did better.

The English and the Welsh want the Scots and the Northern Irish to remain in the United Kingdom. But the devolutions of 1998 took the decision out of

their hands, and the Brexit referendum has split the four nations of the U.K. This has changed the internal dynamics of English politics. And England is both the most populous and most powerful element of the U.K. The Brexit campaign and result were watersheds in the emergence of a distinctly English nationalism. For the last decade, a consistent majority of English voters have wanted a devolved national assembly, like those in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Theresa May is insisting that a Scottish referendum must wait until Brexit has been tested “in the real world.” But the political reality of the U.K. is already riven by bitterness over Brexit. National identity is an emotional question, discussed in political terms. Already, London and its environs feel like a country apart—a sixth state for the four peoples of the British Isles. The origins of the U.K. in the English Empire mean that the English will be the last to leave the United Kingdom. The outcome of the Brexit negotiations may also mean that the English will be the last to be left.



May signs the Brexit letter.

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Darwin's Arch, Galapagos Islands

Survival of the Pithiest

How Charles Darwin got New England talking. BY STEPHEN MILLER

In early 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*—published in Britain in November 1859—became a topic of conversation among a number of New England intellectuals. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau read the *Origin*. So did Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa Alcott, and Charles Loring Brace, the founder of the Children's Aid Society.

Stephen Miller is the author, most recently, of Walking New York: Reflections of American Writers from Walt Whitman to Teju Cole.

The Book That Changed America
How Darwin's Theory of Evolution Ignited a Nation
 by Randall Fuller
 Viking, 304 pp., \$27

Two leading scientists also read the *Origin*: the botanist Asa Gray, who defended Darwin, and the zoologist Louis Agassiz, who attacked Darwin. Now, in *The Book That Changed America*, Randall Fuller declares that “the *Origin* did what few books ever do: alter the conversation a society is having about itself.”

Did Darwin's theory of evolution really “ignite a nation”? It's hard to say from the evidence Fuller provides in this lucid book because he writes mainly about New England intellectuals. (Indeed, my only quibble with Fuller is that occasionally he adds novelistic touches that are not warranted.) Yet perhaps the subtitle is accurate, for Darwin wrote to Asa Gray: “I assure you I am astonished at the impression my Book has made on many minds.”

The *Origin* only marginally altered the conversation about slavery. Darwin's theory that every living creature is descended from one prototype

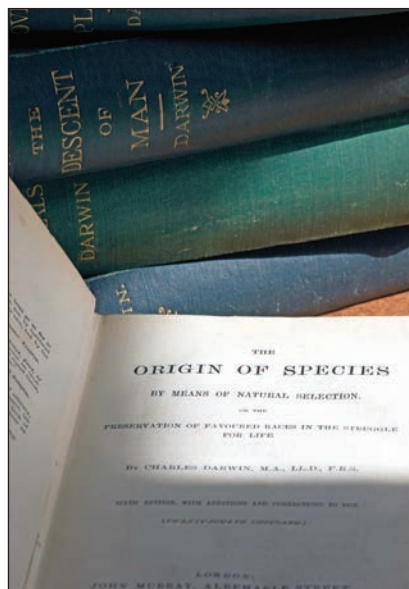
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

undermined the argument for polygenesis—the notion that God created blacks as a separate species. Yet many writers who agreed with Darwin that there was a common origin for all human beings nevertheless argued that blacks were at a lower stage of development than whites, somewhere between apes and humans. This view was widespread among Southern apologists for slavery—cartoonists often depicted Abraham Lincoln as a man/ape—but this view was also commonplace in the North. The *Origin* did not change anyone’s mind about slavery; it just gave writers for and against slavery different arguments to support their positions. Darwinism, Fuller says, “could be used to support just about any social or political claim one wanted to make.”

Like all the New England intellectuals, Louis Agassiz and Asa Gray condemned slavery, yet Agassiz insisted that blacks were a different species. Opposing miscegenation—it was called “amalgamation”—Agassiz believed that people of African descent should return to Africa. Gray said that it was impossible for blacks to be a different species: Different species cannot interbreed, yet slaveholders often mated with slaves. Polygenists argued that biracial children were infertile, but there was no evidence to support this claim. Charles Loring Brace agreed with Agassiz that it would be best if blacks emigrated: The United States, he argued, was a great nation because its leaders were Anglo-Saxons. He worried (Fuller writes) “that one day America might not be a white nation at all.” Brace, however, disagreed with Agassiz about Darwin: He admired the *Origin* and made use of Darwin’s theory in his *Races of the Old World*, which Fuller calls “a sprawling, ramshackle work . . . deeply marred by a series of internal contradictions.”

The *Origin* had a greater impact on the conversation about science and religion. Many Americans rejected the notion that the diversity of species was a result of chance. They agreed with Agassiz, who conducted a public campaign against Darwin, calling the theory of natural selection “fanci-

ful.” Agassiz said that God had created immutable species: “What,” he asked, “has the whale in the arctic regions to do with the lion or the tiger in the tropical Indies?” Agassiz always invoked God as an explanation for the diversity of the animal kingdom: “There is a design according to which they were built, which must have been conceived before they were called into existence.” (Gray argued that Agassiz’s view “was theistic to excess.” By referring the origin and distribution of species “directly to the Divine will,” he said, Agassiz was removing the study of organic life from “the domain of inductive science.”)



Bronson Alcott rejected *any* theory of species diversity that left out God. He offered his own odd take on evolution—arguing, in Fuller’s words, that “*all* creatures had begun as humans, as part of a Universal Spirit. . . . The lower the animal in the chain of being, the further that particular animal had fallen from its true spiritual state.” Humans came first! Alcott was the most woolly-minded of the New England intellectuals, yet even the astute Gray was reluctant to give up the notion of design. He wrote to Darwin to say that design must have played some part in evolution; how else can one explain the extraordinary nature of the human eye? “I grieve to say that I cannot honestly go as far as you do

about design,” Darwin replied. “I cannot think the world, as we see it, is the result of chance; and yet I cannot look at each separate thing as the result of design.” Darwin maintained that “the notion of design must after all rest mostly on faith.” But he did not think his theory should affect people’s religious beliefs: “I had no intention to write atheistically.” Gray, a devout Presbyterian, concluded that God chose natural selection as the method for creation: “A fortuitous Cosmos is simply inconceivable,” he said. “The alternative is a designed Cosmos.”

Fuller points out that, by 1876, “a large swath of the liberal clergy” agreed with Asa Gray that natural selection was a mechanism employed by God. Yet, to this day, many Americans do not accept Darwin’s theory: According to a recent survey by the Pew Research Group, “34 percent of Americans reject evolution entirely, saying humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.”

The *Origin* also affected the conversation Americans were having about politics. Should capitalism be regulated? Adam Smith thought that it should, but Social Darwinists warned that regulating capitalism was misguided because it was against nature. Capitalism should be understood as a Darwinian struggle where the “fittest” thrived; why help the “unfit” when it was clear from nature that they were doomed to fail? So argued Yale social scientist William Graham Sumner:

A drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be, according to the fitness and tendency of things. Nature has set upon him the process of decline and dissolution by which she removes things which have survived their usefulness.

A good gloss on Sumner’s thought is a remark Gray made to Brace: “When you *unscientific people* take up a scientific principle, you are apt to make too much of it, to push it to conclusions beyond what is warranted by the facts.”

Fuller begins and ends this book with Thoreau, who admired Darwin’s detailed observation of the natural world in both *The Voyage of the Beagle*

and *The Origin of Species*. Thoreau was a budding natural scientist who took thousands of pages of notes about local flora. “What he intended to do with all this data,” Fuller says, “is still not entirely clear.” Fuller speculates that Thoreau may have “had difficulty organizing his material into a coherent project. . . . He had adopted the methods of science without the benefit of a scientific theory.”

The strongest evidence that Darwin influenced Thoreau comes from Thoreau’s notebooks. In the last year of his life (Thoreau died in 1862) he embarked on a project to record the innumerable ways in which local forest trees propagated and thrived in a constantly changing environment. And in his notebook, he offers a hypothesis about what he has observed: “The development theory implies a

greater vital force in nature, because it is more flexible and accommodating, and equivalent to a sort of constant *new* creation.” Thoreau, Fuller contends, “no longer relies upon divinity to explain the natural world.” Fuller supports his contention with another sentence from Thoreau’s notebooks: “Thus we should say that oak forests are produced by a kind of *accident*.”

Of course, the notion of “accident” would have been rejected by Bronson Alcott, who was a close friend of Thoreau’s. Alcott visited Thoreau on the day he died, reporting that his friend was “lying patiently & cheerfully on the bed he would never leave again.” Another visitor, an aunt, asked Thoreau: “Have you made your peace with God?”

“We never quarreled,” Thoreau replied. ♦

one more instance of what he saw as happening to language and literature everywhere: the human stakes were being removed, words were let loose in the playground, no agents or intentions were to be seen.

Forty years later, Empson may be making something of a comeback. Oxford has recently published John Haffenden’s two-volume biography, which gives a fascinating portrait of Empson’s turbulent life, from his student days (he was dismissed from Cambridge when a box of condoms was found in his room!) to his turn to the East—he taught first in Tokyo, then in Beijing from 1931 to 1952, except for the interim of the war, continuing to write and publish his own poetry—to his postwar years as London literary lion, chair of English literature at Sheffield University, and distinguished lecturer in America and around the world. However messy and disaster-prone Empson’s private life may have been, his brilliance, learning, and wit were never at issue.

Seven Types of Ambiguity set the stage for a new way of reading poetry. The young Empson was the first to admit that his sevenfold division was arbitrary, that in practice his categories merged and overlapped. Thus, the first ambiguity—“Mere richness (a metaphor valid from many points of view)” —and the second—“Two different meanings conveying the same point”—are not really distinct; and neither are the other five, culminating in number seven: “Two meanings that are the opposites created by the context.”

All Empson really meant to convey by announcing that there are 7 types of ambiguity (there might have been 17!) was that by definition, poetry was characterized by the multivalence of its language. An ambiguity is defined on the opening page of the book as “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.” And Empson adds, commonsensically: “Sometimes . . . the word may be stretched absurdly far, but it is descriptive because it suggests the analytical mode of approach, and with that I am concerned.”



The Codebreaker

On the critical legacy of William Empson.

BY MARJORIE PERLOFF

Today, when literary criticism—especially the close reading of lyric poetry—has become a suspect discipline, largely dismissed for its elitism and irrelevance to the political order, Michael Wood’s elegant and concise study of the great British literary critic William Empson (1906-1984) is especially welcome. Empson was all of 22 when he produced, at the suggestion of his Cambridge supervisor I. A. Richards, a bulky manuscript called *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Published in 1930, the book quickly became a classic, read and hotly debated in classrooms across Britain and the United States. Not until the 1970s, with the rise of Decon-

On Empson

by Michael Wood
Princeton, 224 pp., \$22.95

struction, did Empson’s star go down, the irony being (as Wood notes) that he anticipated so many of the theorems of what he called, in a letter to a friend, “those horrible Frenchmen”—he referred to the chef d’école of Deconstruction as “Nerrida”—who were “so very disgusting, in a social and moral way.” Wood explains:

What Empson found disgusting was the seeking out, as he saw it, of complexity for complexity’s sake, a project that was “always pretending to be plumbing the depths” but in reality was only congratulating itself on its cleverness. Above all he took it—this was in 1971—as just

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OPPOSITE: PICTURE POST / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

“The analytical mode,” which became Empson’s stock-in-trade, involved a technical rigor (he initially came to Cambridge to study mathematics) that is the very antithesis of the current emphasis on what a given poem *says*, what information or morality it imparts. Denotation and connotation, metaphor and metaphysical conceit, pun, rhetorical figure, syntactic form, sound play, and rhythmic structure: All these aspects of poetic language are to be examined so as to detail the rich ambiguity of the poem in question—its power to charm by its range and depth. But unlike the American New Critics, who insisted on the “intentional fallacy,” regarding a poem as an object not to be judged by external criteria including the poet’s intention, and unlike Michael Foucault and Roland Barthes, who made their eloquent cases for “the death of the author,” Empson was quite willing to use whatever biographical, historical, or cultural knowledge might be relevant in unpacking the meaning of the poems he discussed.

That corpus, however—and this may well be seen as a limitation—was confined to canonical epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry in English, mostly from the Renaissance through the 18th century with a few examples from T.S. Eliot and other moderns. Here is Empson on the opening quatrain of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73, *That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang / Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, / Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.*

The comparison [between boughs of the tree and choirs] holds for many reasons: because ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing, because they involve sitting in a row, because they are made of wood, are carved into knots and so forth, because they used to be surrounded by a sheltering building crystallized out of the likeness of a forest, and colored with stained glass and painting like flowers and leaves.



William Empson (1946)

Michael Wood, who cites this passage, further comments:

When I think of this poem I am most taken by the thought that the choirs and the birds can be both literal and metaphorical—the birds can be birds or boys, and they can sing in the ruin or in the forest; the choir is a choir and a cluster of trees—and a real tension arises as soon as we remember the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which occurred in the 1530s, and altered the architectural face of England in so many ways, to say nothing of Henry VIII’s sources of income.

Contemporary readers, unaccustomed to such dissection of a single line of poetry, may complain that it is overkill; but as Wood points out, Empson’s underlying assumption is that a real critic is first and foremost a *writer*—someone, as Barthes put it, who “experiences the depth” of language. Empson’s method, like that of Barthes or (closer to home) T.S. Eliot, is inimicable, because his own imagination is so rich and idiosyncratic that it generates responses few other readers will

fully share. As such, Empson is the perfect subject for his fellow northerner and Cambridge graduate, now Princeton professor Michael Wood, himself a highly individual and imaginative critic, difficult to assign to this or that school or movement.

But what about Empson’s poetry? When *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was published, Empson already enjoyed a considerable reputation as a poet: His first collection, *Poems*, appeared in 1935 and won the respect of Eliot, W.H. Auden, and the F.R. Leavisites at Cambridge. In the United States, he was never as renowned. His formal, elegant, and stately poems, featuring the dense conceits and puns of John Donne and the other Metaphysicals who were his model, may have appealed to such New Critical counterparts as John Crowe Ransom and the young Robert Lowell; but when, in the 1960s, the William Carlos Williams colloquial mode came to dominate,

Empson’s densely allusive symbolist mode was largely eclipsed. Perhaps it was seen as too programmatic. Here is the opening of “Note on Local Flora,” cited by Wood as one of Empson’s signal poems:

*There is a tree native in Turkestan
Or further east towards the Tree
of Heaven,
Whose hard cold cones, not being
wards to time,
Will leave their mother only for good
cause;
Will ripen only in a forest fire.*

Wood comments:

“There is a tree” has the sound of a fable, a sort of botanical “once upon a time,” and the shift from Turkestan to Heaven—some distance “further east”—confirms this effect. The tree is “native” to those parts but there is one in Kew Gardens in London (introduced in line 10, as “thirst[ing] for the Red Dawn”). And wherever it grows, the tree has this curious characteristic: only fire will make it flourish. “Leave their mother” is a marvelous ambiguity.

When the fire arrives the cones will drop to the ground, abandoning their parent, and their fall will allow their mother to cover herself with leaves.”

The second half of the poem draws on Greek myth for its dense symbolic network. It all adds up, so Wood argues, to the poet’s attraction to revolution: “The thirsting tree represents a widely held but equally widely repressed belief: that only violence will allow us truly to live, to do something with time other than mark it.”

But if this reading is plausible, then surely “Note on Local Flora” is, despite its complex figuration and allusion, a one-dimensional poem with a clear extractable meaning. The ability to extract such a definite theme is precisely what Empson (and Wood after him) oppose in their readings of Shakespeare or Pope or metaphysical poetry, where the most minor detail can prove to be telling.

Indeed, the “tree native to Turkestan” is evoked by pure fiat, so that the poet can spin out his paradox, and the poem has the willed air of exercise rather than experience. Or again, responding to the imminent threat of war during his Tokyo stay, in a love poem called “Aubade,” Empson gives us the line *Only the same war on a stronger toe*, which Wood reads as a reference to the uncertain political climate of Europe, “the war already in the air” and “present in the East too.” No doubt this is the case, but surely the metaphor of imminent war as a man rising “on a stronger toe” is no more than one-dimensional. Indeed, whereas such metaphors as “the rooky wood” of Macbeth radiate ancillary meanings through the entire play, Empson’s metaphors tend to be one-liners, and Wood, following suit, explicates them, one by one.

But only two of Wood’s seven chapters deal with the poetry: the other five contain excellent readings of the critical studies. In his later books—*Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951), and *Milton’s God* (1961)—Empson carried out the dissection of poetic language he initiated in *Seven Types*. Wood gives us excellent and shrewd

discussions of the highlights. The chapter on *King Lear* in *The Structure of Complex Words*, Wood declares, “is one of the masterpieces of literary criticism of any time and leaves us thrilled and exhausted in ways that resemble the effects of the play itself.” Here, Empson takes the trope made of the repeated words “fool, madman, jester, clown, simpleton” to show how folly is at the very core of Lear’s own nature, even as the simplicity of true folly eludes him till the bitter end. Empson’s commentary on the “folly” complex takes him from Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly* to what he takes to be the drama’s critique of Christianity: His is, indeed, an enormously rich reading of *King Lear*. Equally fine is Empson’s dissection of the word *honest* in *Othello*, zeroing in on “honest Iago,” the villain who is (in one sense) the most “honest” character in the tragedy, being the one who is least deceived.

On Empson ends somewhat abruptly with a short chapter on *Milton’s God*, which dwells on such striking paradoxes as “the reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad.” However one agrees or disagrees with Empson’s reading of Milton, it is exciting and provocative. Wood’s critical introduction to Empson’s bracing and controversial criticism will hopefully bring a new readership to one of the great neglected critical minds of the 20th century.

If we come away with one thing from *On Empson*, it is the reminder, in the age of STEM courses, of just how much poetry matters—matters not on ethical or political grounds but simply for its own sake, for its exposure of the possibilities of the *language* that we use every waking moment of every day without taking into account its astonishing possibilities for knowledge, power, and, especially, pleasure. ♦



Ambiguous Eye

John James Audubon: chronicler or conservationist?

BY CHRISTOPH IRMSCHER

In the early spring of 1843, John James Audubon, perhaps the greatest naturalist America has ever produced, traveled up the Missouri River. He had embarked on a project that he hoped would rival the success of his *Birds of America*.

This time he was after quadrupeds—scraggy, furry, resilient creatures that lived on, or under, the ground. But the West turned out to be much different from what he expected. The Indians, disease-ridden and unimaginably poor, did not at all look like the proud, colorfully attired tribal leaders George Catlin had painted a mere 10 years earlier. And

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The Missouri River Journals of John James Audubon

edited by Daniel Patterson
Nebraska, 512 pp., \$75

the large-scale slaughter of the buffalo, despite the fact that he too contributed to it, left Audubon dispirited about the future of his adoptive country. At age 58, with no teeth left to eat the meat he craved, Audubon himself had entered his twilight years.

At Fort Union, Audubon and the other members of his party were the guests of trader Alexander Culbertson and his Blackfoot wife. It was during his stay there that Audubon drew a memorable representation of two 13-lined ground squirrels—“Leopard

Spermophiles,” he called them—perched on a small, nearly bare hill, tails bent in nervous anticipation, their heads cocked as if they were looking at us. For the print, he added a view of Fort Union in the distance, likely provided by his son Victor: unmemorable, flat, a mere dot in a landscape where the animals, not we, are the real residents. That was Audubon’s way of teaching us humility.

Or was it? Daniel Patterson, an English professor at Central Michigan University, would probably have concerns about such a reading. If you think Audubon really cared that much about the environment, think again, he says in this new book about the naturalist’s last expedition. After Audubon’s death in 1851, Maria Audubon, embarrassed by her grandfather’s rough frontier manners and execrable grammar, went over his papers, changed what she saw fit, and freely destroyed what she felt should not be shared. The journal Audubon kept during his Western trip wasn’t spared, either. Hence, the only coherent narrative we have about his experiences is one that passed through Maria’s filter, and the environmental concerns he voiced—about the passing of the last buffalo and the disappearance of the great auk—are hers, not her grandfather’s.

Here, Patterson wants to set the record straight. He collects entries from three “forgotten” manuscripts that survived Maria’s editing fury—portions of the original, complete manuscript held by the Newberry and Beinecke libraries, as well as a field journal still in private hands—and supplements them with accounts provided by members of Audubon’s team, including the amateur naturalist Edward Harris. This is a herculean task that almost makes us forgive him for inflating his claims: Audubon’s field journal, for example, rather than being forgotten, appeared prominently in the 2000 exhibit “John James Audubon in the West” at the Buffalo Bill Hill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.

To be sure, this is not the first time Patterson has tried his hand at capturing the true Audubon. In 2011, he published Audubon’s 1826 journal, edited with the help of a microfilm copy of a manuscript owned by the



Audubon’s eastern gray squirrels (1846)

Field Museum. But *The Missouri River Journals*, a curious hybrid of edition, biography, and diatribe, is a more ambitious project: Patterson’s main target is all those fans of Audubon who have tried to squeeze their hero’s life into the shape of a neat conversion narrative, in which Audubon, the great shooter of birds, seeing the Western plains littered with dead bison, saw the light and began to worry about the future.

The real Audubon, contends Patterson, wasn’t really a conservationist—which is not exactly shocking news for anyone who has, like this reviewer, tried to explain Audubon’s industrial-

style killings to schoolchildren. But Patterson does have a consolation prize for us, and for support he turns to Audubon’s 3,000-page collection of bird essays, finished years before his Western trip, *Ornithological Biography* (1831-39). Instead of paying attention to what Audubon did, Patterson wants us to listen more closely to what he wrote. Patterson calls this the difference between a “lived” and a “written” ethic, and he traces the evolution of the latter—a beautiful vision of a partnership between animals and humans—through the five volumes of *Ornithological Biography*.

The only problem with this rather academic argument is that Audubon's essays, wonderful as they are, were written in close collaboration with the Scottish ornithologist William MacGillivray, who (as Audubon himself said) "smoothed down the asperities" of his style and, as surviving drafts show, made a lot of other changes as well. It's mystifying that Patterson, who is intent on recovering the original, unadulterated Audubon, treats the highly edited pieces in *Ornithological Biography* as authentic utterances from the oracle. (And why offer these reflections on Audubon's ornithological work in a volume dedicated to a trip Audubon undertook in search of quadrupeds?)

While Patterson's theoretical musings often overreach, his transcriptions strike me as underprepared. Yale's Beinecke Library has made a digital copy of Audubon's journal publicly available, so it's easy to compare Patterson's work with the original. Mistakes abound. Some of them are due to simple carelessness or haste—for example, J.K. Mitchell's poem on Audubon was published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* not on March 15 but on March 18, 1843 (which was, appropriately, a Saturday). Other errors are more serious and affect the readability of Patterson's text, such as the nonsensical word "Minnidens" he offers in his transcription of a passage written on August 9, where Audubon admits that he is weary of Native Americans, both "Chiefs & Murmidons" (an alternative spelling of "Myrmidons" or warriors).

And consider this almost-comical sentence from the entry for August 5: "They had seen no 'Fuchs of the plain.'" Was Patterson thinking of the German word for "fox"? Audubon's scribe had clearly written—and that is how the much-maligned Maria Audubon read it too—"Cocks of the plain," a term for sage grouse. On yet another occasion, in his transcription of the entry for August 8, 1843, Patterson leaves out a crucial word, rendering a sentence more difficult than it needs to be. The passage in question involves, in fact, those wonderful Leopard Spermophiles: "We killed a sperm hoodii, which . . . entered its hole and Harris

had shot it, had to draw it out by the hind legs." The transcription would have made more sense had Patterson included the "who" that is clearly present in the original: ". . . and Harris *who* had shot it."

This is not scholarly nitpicking, since Patterson's case for representing a version superior to that of Audubon's bowdlerizing granddaughter rests on the absolute accuracy of his own efforts.

In sum, *The Missouri River Journals* is a head-scratcher. It is, perhaps, best treated as a resource—a convenient, if unreliable, gathering place for information about Audubon's final great expedition. I detest as much as the next person what Maria Audubon did to her grandfather's manuscripts, and Patterson is right to call her out on inserting

anachronistic references to extinction into his journals. But my own familiarity with the man, now of several decades' standing, compels me to point out that Audubon, who all his life told the most ridiculous lies about himself, would have found the very notion of authenticity laughable. His all-consuming passion was for his art, and he took what he needed—from nature, science, his family, and friends—to realize it.

Because he was such a great artist, Audubon was ultimately able to transcend his own limitations and give us a vision of something others could not see as well as he: a glimpse of the world as it would look if an animal as small as a ground squirrel saw it, discovering that the strangest and most disconcerting thing in the world is, in fact, us. ♦

BCA

L'Orfeo Ascending

Baroque Italy meets classical Japan.

BY PAULA DEITZ

Kamakura, Japan

I arrived in this ancient samurai capital on a warm autumnal afternoon to attend a groundbreaking performance of a baroque opera out-of-doors on the grounds of the sacred Shinto shrine Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. Young priests were scurrying about shaded lanes in their pastel *hakama*, the long-pleated pants they wear over crisp white kimonos. On the outskirts, the immense lotus ponds were looking seasonal with their scattering of upright brown seedpods. I seated myself near the pavilion with water troughs, where visitors scooped up water with wooden ladles to purify their hands before ascending the grand staircase to the main shrine.

In this serene atmosphere, I had a quiet moment to look back at how I came to be here. Like other opera aficionados, I now await new productions

with fear and trepidation as directors attempt to outdo each other, either by establishing a new time frame or another locale—sometimes both—to make the performance of a masterwork appear more relevant. More often than not, one leaves feeling the overlay distracts from, rather than enhances, the original work.

But last year I discovered there is another way to enrich opera when, on a cold rainy evening in New York, I attended a joint lecture by the Australian conductor Aaron Carpenè, a leading authority on baroque opera, and the visionary director Stefano Vizioli, who were visiting from Rome. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of bilateral relations between Japan and Italy, they proposed to stage Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in Japan, integrating into the opera itself traditional formal elements of that country's performing arts. In 2013, they had already succeeded in Bhutan by mounting that country's

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first opera ever with a cross-cultural production of Handel's pastorate *Acis and Galatea*, incorporating Bhutanese song, dance, instrumentation, and colorful folk costumes.

In Japan, they connected with Kyoko Mimura, president of a Japanese organization called Friendship Bridge, which seeks to create an international dialogue through classical music and the arts. They became the producers of the opera, garnering support and identifying the specific Japanese performing artists to be included.

First performed in 1607 in the ducal palace of Mantua, *L'Orfeo* (with a libretto by Alessandro Striggio) marked the emergence of opera in its definitive form—with arias, duets, and choruses—though it was not the first musical drama to engage the classical Greek myth of the semi-deity musician and poet Orpheus. As the story goes, in this version, on their wedding day Orpheus's beloved Euridice dies from a snake bite, and he charms his way with his music into the underworld to reclaim her, only to lose her again when (though prohibited from doing so) he looks back at her on their journey upward.

It is not unusual to discover similar mythologies in diverse cultures. In Japan, the creation myth from the *Kojiki*, an 8th-century chronicle, centers around the deities Izanagi and Izanami, who, standing on the floating bridge of heaven, stirred the waters below with a jeweled spear, and the droplets that fell formed solid land. Eventually, their children became Japan's islands; but Izanami, in giving birth to the fire god, died and went to the land of the dead. Like Orpheus, Izanagi descended to retrieve her and, after being warned not to gaze upon her, fled when he lit a torch and saw she was a decomposed corpse.

These corresponding myths gave a genuine basis to link the two cultures in an opera performance that would combine an exuberant Italian baroque interpretation with the more grave, stately aspects of ancient Japanese theater, music, and dance. To expand the vision, Aaron Carpenè, who

based the performance on a facsimile of the 1609 version, revived the librettist Striggio's original Act Five ending, in which the Bacchantes rip Orpheus apart after his final diatribe against women. (In the substituted ending, a fatherly Apollo appeases his son Orpheus and carries him to heaven.)



With no extant music for the Bacchic finale, Carpenè engaged the Japanese composer and conductor Ryusuke Numajiri to complete this portion of the opera preceding Monteverdi's final chorus with the *moresca* dance.

To add to this delectable combination, the first performances would take place here at the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. As dusk gathered, we took our seats around the thrust stage connected to one of the shrine's deep red and elaborately gilded open pavilions under a pagoda roof that sheltered the orchestra of period instruments. Above us, a sliver of a moon shone through branches of golden trees as two Shinto priests in white, with ritualistic shiny black hats, came onstage waving boughs of leaves to bless the performance. When the conductor Carpenè emerged, the anticipation in the audience was palpable as the applause died down and the heralding strains of the prologue's Renaissance

trombones (or sackbuts) and trumpets wafted in the air.

As *La Musica* (soprano Gemma Bertagnolli) entered for her poignant yet seductive aria, setting the tone for songs "happy and sad," her long, flowing, zigzag-patterned gown revealed one Italian aspect of the performance:

The costumes were designed by Angela Missoni and Luca Missoni in their trademark primary-colored-plus-strong-black-and-white stripes of all widths in a floating fabric draped into garments—jackets, skirts, dresses, cloaks—combined with white tops and bottoms (except for Orpheus in black). As the chorus of shepherds and nymphs poured onto the stage in joyous song, these costumes, contemporary yet timeless, literally swirled in twists and turns in dances choreographed by Gloria Giordano with an éclat that carried throughout the production. During the *balletto* for the wedding celebration, specialists performed the *taranta* and *pizzica*, traditional southern Italian folk dances.

When Orpheus (Vittorio Prato, a handsome, lanky Italian baritone) began the romantic aria "Rosa del ciel, vita del mondo" to his bride, he captivated the audience with his tonal clarity and strength of presentation. In response,

Euridice (the Japanese soprano Sakiko Abe, a specialist in baroque music) sang with sweet allure. But no sooner were their festivities established than the *Messagera* (soprano Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli) arrived amidst the rejoicing to announce the death of Euridice (“Ahi, caso acerbo”) in measured tones, all the more bitter in this production in contrast to the ebullience of youth.

When Caronte refused to transport Orpheus as a living being, the hero responded with the captivating “Posente spirto, e formidabil nume” aria, the most lyrical of the opera. Each of the first three verses was accompanied by a different instrument, followed by its own melodic interlude: first, the violin; second, the cornetto; and finally the harp—here not only the orchestral harp but an electronic laser

and, behind them, the gagaku players.

When all was set in motion, the singing, the playing of the *sho* with the viola da gamba and the archlute, and the solemn, refined movements and minced steps of the Noh actors—he terrifying in luxurious black and gold with wild black hair, she in a pale transparent robe with a gold floral motif—nothing surpassed the beauty of the combination.

Although Orpheus wins his appeal, he loses Euridice out of doubt and love as soon as he turns to gaze upon her, and she fades away with her moving aria “Ahi, vista troppo dolce e troppo amara.” As the final act opens, with Orpheus on the plains of Thrace communicating with his echo—a faint voice coming from a distance through surrounding trees—he turns against love and “*vil femina*” (a worthless woman), whereupon the original libretto came to life (after a bridge text written by the conductor) with Numajiri’s new music blending seamlessly with Monteverdi.

The chorus of bacchantes entered to take vengeance on Orpheus, the singers, dressed in white, becoming the actual destroyers of Orpheus as they danced in a frenzied circle around him, twirling their double fans that became symbolic knives. Costumed in pastel kimonos with diaphanous overgarments, they appeared to be moving through a swirl of vaporous clouds. Then, in an unprecedented combination of Noh Theater with Nihon Buyo School dance, the Noh Grand Master Kazufusa Hosho entered in bright red silk, wearing the mask of Hashihime, a heartbroken woman-turned-demon who tore Orpheus’s jacket to pieces as a symbolic end. In the background, Noh musicians beat hand drums while a chanter added to the rhythmic fury.

Returning to Monteverdi’s original ending, the chorus of nymphs and shepherds performed the joyous finale—“Vanne Orfeo, felice a pieno”—with the moresca dances celebrating the spirit of Orpheus. The audience rose in affirmation. And so *JapanOrfeo* was born. Long may it live as an exhilarating marriage of two cultures as it travels around the world. ♦



Giving Orpheus hope to regain Euridice, Speranza (sung by Bertagnolli) led him to where Caronte, the boatman, ferries the dead to the underworld. Seated in a row behind her as she gathered up the stricken hero, three gagaku performers of imperial court music played bamboo wind instruments: a *ryuteki* (seven-holed transverse flute), a *hichiriki* (seven-holed, double-reed woodwind), and the majestic *sho*, with 17 thin, upright bamboo pipes. The mournful strains of their music blended perfectly with the baroque, two courtly traditions intertwined. At the threshold to the underworld, Speranza, hope personified, could go no farther, singing “Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate,” Striggio’s literal twist on Dante’s admonishment—“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”—from the third Canto of the *Inferno*.

harp, 11 bright green beams projected across the stage, created by sound artist Pietro Pirelli, who “plucked” by blocking the beams in succession. The harmony of the two harps vibrating on the night air was spellbinding.

Bypassing the now-sleeping Caronte, Orpheus entered the kingdom of the dead for the regal sequence, in which the singing rulers Plutone and Proserpina were doubled by a performance of masked actors from the Hosho School of Noh Theater. Grand Master Kazufusa Hosho played the female role of Proserpina, though patterned after the female deity Izanami, with her consort Izanagi carrying the giveaway spear. Portraying the royal couple of the underworld, bass Ugo Guagliardo and Mazzulli, dressed in Missoni funereal black and white, sang to one side—she pleading with emotion to release Euridice to Orpheus—while the Noh actors took center stage

Money for Nothing

Disney's \$160 million might have been better spent.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Until its final scene, there isn't a moment in the new live-action version of *Beauty and the Beast* that wasn't done better in the 1991 animated film from which it derives.

The songs are sung worse: Emma Watson works hard to trill on-key as the real live Belle, but in the original, Belle's lush and confident voice in the opening number (voiced by Paige O'Hara) is what tells you she is a formidable person to be reckoned with.

The characterizations are worse. Ewan McGregor's transformed CGI valet, Lumière, doesn't hold a candelabra to Jerry Orbach's, or to the latter's sensational original rendition of "Be Our Guest," which is the high point of the cartoon but a flat soufflé in this one.

The visual scheme overseen by director Bill Condon is worse. The tavern in which Gaston the hunter sings his solipsistic paean to his own manliness is riotously overdone in the original (which credits Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise as directors) but is just a shadowy, if lavishly, art-decorated set here.

The script is worse, with screenwriters Stephen Chbosky and Evan Spiliotopoulos taking Linda Woolverton's superbly distilled version of the fairy tale and adding all kinds of pointless "context." They seem to have been obsessed with explaining things that shouldn't be explained—such as why the enchantress who transformed the vain prince into a monstrous beast had also turned his castle staff into clocks and teapots and the like. The ridiculous reason given for the fate of the household is that these servants

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Beauty and the Beast

Directed by Bill Condon



didn't intervene when the prince's father was mistreating him—because, you know, servants in pre-revolutionary France really had the means and opportunity to prevent aristocrats from abusing their kids. In any case, this is a fairy tale, and fairy tales are deliberately harsh stories that traffic in sadistic hardship. Trying to explain away a magical injustice in a fairy tale is to misunderstand what fairy tales are trying to teach us.

And adjusting for the time, the special effects are worse. By which I mean, in 1991, something happened in the cartoon that had never happened before: During the scene set to the title song, in which the two title characters dance together, the camera moved and swirled as they did. It sounds like nothing now, but no one had seen its like before. This was the moment at which computer-generated imagery moved from its infancy into its adolescence on its way to becoming the next great advance in cinematic storytelling.

There's not a special-effects trick here that makes you gasp—as there was, for example, in last year's *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*—despite the fact that it cost \$160 million

to make. It's impossible to make sense out of what they spent that money on.

The movie is making coin hand over fist, so if I say there's literally no reason for its existence, I'm saying something foolish. It exists to earn a billion dollars in rentals worldwide, and it's going to do that. But I'm right as a matter of aesthetics: There was no need for a new version of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* without an inspired and original vision of how to do it because, as it happens, the original is all but unimprovable. It is, in fact, one of the greatest movies ever made, and one of the most important.

The 1991 cartoon was released two years after Disney reinvigorated the animated feature with *The Little Mermaid*, which awakened the form by adding the pizzazz and wit of a first-rate Broadway musical, but still only intermittently. But *Beauty and the Beast* is a unified whole, seamlessly integrating song and story, emotion and lesson, in a manner that can only be called timeless. And it moves like a bullet train.

Consider this fact: Disney's powers-that-be ruthlessly decided to cut an absolutely wonderful song called "Human Again" from the original score. "Human Again," in which the enchanted objects in the beast's castle ruminate on what they will do when they are restored to life, is so good that it became the showstopper when *Beauty and the Beast* was transmogrified into a Broadway musical in 1994. But the thing is, in the movie's own terms, the elimination of "Human Again" was absolutely the right decision. Just 84 minutes long, *Beauty and the Beast* is practically flawless, in fact, and perfectly paced—but it wouldn't have been with "Human Again" in there.

One example of how disappointing the new *Beauty and the Beast* is: It runs 40 minutes longer than the cartoon and has a bunch of new songs in it. They're all lousy. And none of them is "Human Again." The movie does leave you on a high, as the restoration of the castle and the enchanted objects provides it with a genuinely exhilarating and well-earned finale. But when the only successful new thing in a remake comes in the last 90 seconds, you've been had. ♦

“CBS anchor [Scott Pelley] has set himself apart in covering the Trump administration by abandoning careful neutrality in favor of pointed truth-telling.”

—Washington Post, March 27, 2017

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CBS News parts ways with anchor Scott Pelley

ANCHOR FIRED FOR ANTI-TRUMP STANCE

Cited for ‘pattern of hostile pre-judgment’

BY AGANDA MASTON

NEW YORK — CBS News announced yesterday that it has fired lead anchor Scott Pelley, after the anchor refused to moderate his confrontational reports that showed him to be increasingly antagonistic toward President Donald Trump’s administration. The decision did not come as a surprise in media circles, where Pelley’s open disdain for Trump had isolated him, both at CBS and among the political media as a whole.

“It’s simple. Scott was fired for abandoning the careful neutrality that CBS is famous for,” said longtime CBS News correspondent Steve Kroft. “CBS just doesn’t tolerate ideology in the newsroom,” Kroft added. “This is the network of Dan Rather, after all.”

Pelley’s refusal to remain a disinterested reporter after Trump was elected president made him



Fired and friendless, former CBS News anchor Scott Pelley pauses yesterday afternoon on a Manhattan park bench.

an outsider in the media and ended up costing him a lot more than his job. “Scott compromised everything we believe in as journalists just to score political points and goose the ratings,” said longtime CBS colleague Lesley Stahl. “It’s hard to admit this, but his friends abandoned him. We didn’t know what else to do.”

Pelley himself acknowledged that his open skepticism of the president’s policies had perhaps crossed a line. “I knew it was a huge risk to take on Trump,” he admitted. “I watched for decades as colleagues bent over backwards

to remain unbiased. And here I was, calling out a sitting president on television,” he said with a rueful laugh. “I must have been mad to think the media would stand for it.”

He might have been mad, but his nightly reports made the media world angry. As any close observer of Trump’s unlikely ascent to the White House could attest, major media outlets have treated Trump’s presidency with the same rational, detached perspective

FAIRNESS CONTINUED ON A6

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