

**THE AP'S  
PRONOUN DECREE**  
ANDREW FERGUSON

the weekly

# Standard

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## THE IMMUNE RESPONSE TO TRUMP

BY ANDY SMARICK



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# A Monument to Trump Hatred

“Massive Eisenhower Memorial Could Break Ground as Early as September.” This alarming headline appeared the other day in the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call*. The news is alarming because after years, and many, many millions of dollars, spent tinkering with “starchitect” Frank Gehry’s ludicrous plans for an Ike monument on the National Mall, the design remains what *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*’s Andrew Ferguson has called it: “a deconstructionist fantasy,” a “sly insult to Dwight Eisenhower,” and “a pitiless joke.”

For all that, opposition to the proposed folly has fallen away, worn down by the relentless lobbying of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission. It seems all that’s needed now is for Congress to come up with something north of \$80 million. Oh yes, and President Trump will have to sign off on the expenditure. Eisenhower Commission spokeswoman Chris Cimko declared the group “confident” that Donald

Trump would be eager to back their plans. “President Trump is a builder, and he is a Republican,” Cimko told *Roll Call*. “I can’t imagine that he doesn’t revere Ike.”

But as the paper is quite correct to point out, Trump doesn’t revere Gehry. Let us revisit the reasons—old and new—why.

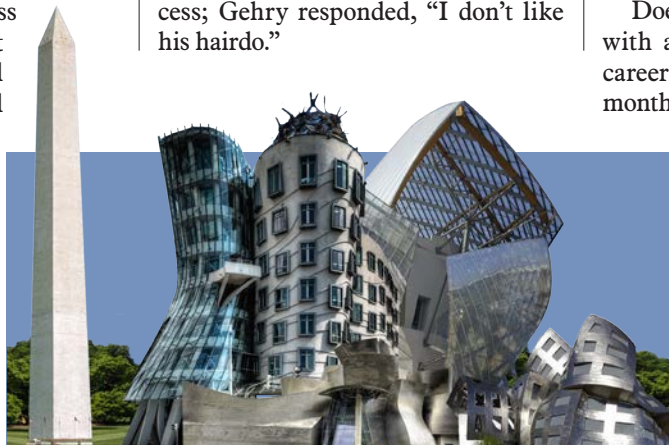
Back in 2010, the Donald had bragging rights that his Trump World Tower was the Big Apple’s tallest residential building. That was until Gehry built an undulating 76-story steel shaft of a skyscraper on Spruce Street. Peeved, Trump wondered publicly if the building would be a financial success; Gehry responded, “I don’t like his hairdo.”

Once Trump was running for president, Gehry’s anti-Donald comments were more pointed. He was among the elites who threatened to leave the country were Trump elected; French president François Hollande said he would be welcomed in France (where they wouldn’t mind having him because not even Gehry could design anything as hideous as the Pompidou Centre). Not long after Trump was elected, the Canadian-born architect told an audience there, “I remember in 1937 and being in Canada and listening to Hitler’s speeches on radio—and this resounded similar to me. It’s just frightening.”

Does Trump really want to crown, with a monument on the Mall, the career of a man who just a couple of months ago was calling him a Hitler?

Now, far be it from *THE SCRAPBOOK* to encourage anything so petty and vindictive as to tear up the Gehry design out of spite. No, of course not: *THE SCRAPBOOK* encourages the decision be made on purely aesthetic grounds.

Speaking of aesthetics, did we mention that Gehry made fun of Trump’s haircut? ♦



TWS PHOTO COLLAGE / HOWARD STANBURY; J. O. SULLIVAN.59; PEDRO SZEKELY; WOJTEK GURA; TURELU

## Trump Makes Men Evil

The left has had a narrative, going back to the beginning of Donald Trump’s campaign, that has only intensified in the months since his election. The theory goes like this: The current president is a force so pestilential that he brings out the hate in otherwise decent people. And now they claim to have scientific proof: “Research Shows Donald Trump Is Making Men More Sexist.”

That was the headline at *Vanity Fair*. It was based on a press release from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton school:

“How Trump’s Election May Be Making Men More Aggressive.” Note that the weaselly qualifier in the Wharton headline—*May Be*—disappeared entirely from the *Vanity Fair* treatment, and “Aggressive” was replaced with the pejorative “Sexist.” Such is how



windy academic speculation becomes rock-solid journalistic certitude.

But even with the “may be,” the researchers’ findings are laughably tendentious. They claim to have documented that men in the age of Trump are “acting more aggressively toward women.” This is based not on the observation of men interacting with women in the natural habitats they share—that would be mere anthropology. No, this is science of a higher order, the sort conducted under laboratory conditions.

The subjects in the average social-psychology experiment are undergraduates paid to fill out

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questionnaires or play games. The way the lab rats fill out their questionnaires or play their games gets quantified; those numbers get crunched and kneaded and weighted and processed until there are results that can be called statistically significant; at which point we're told those results reveal something about the human condition. To which *THE SCRAPBOOK* is inclined to say, "Aw, pull the other one."

In this case, the psych-lab kiddies were playing a standard negotiation game. A pair of students had to agree to divide up \$20, but do so unevenly: One would get \$15, the other \$5, but who? If the two couldn't agree, neither would get anything. Played out through the fall, the crack scientists at Wharton found that the young men, when paired with females, were more gentlemanly before the election and more "aggressive" afterwards.

Even if there were some real effect being captured—and count us skeptical given the hooley regularly labeled social-psychology findings—any number of possible explanations could be put forward. For example, which would be more plausible, that the young men of UPenn turned boorish because they were inspired by Trump's grabby example or that in the days after the election all the snowflakes were too busy melting into puddles to play the negotiation game the way they had before?

Consider an alternative headline, "How Anti-Trump Hysteria May Be Making Some Undergraduates Timid Game-Players." It may have (see, *THE SCRAPBOOK* can play the *maybe* game too) explanatory merit, yes, but also a fatal flaw: It wouldn't get researchers the media attention they were seeking. ♦

## The U.N., Hard at Work

It might come as news to the millions of pink-hatted anti-Trump marchers, the marauding rioters at Berkeley and Middlebury, and the anti-pipeline hippies in North Dakota, but apparently Americans' right to protest is under threat. We know that because two "special rapporteurs on freedom of expres-



The ELEPHANT in the ROOM.

sion" at the United Nations say so.

Our friends at the U.N. cite various moves by state governments to rein in protesters as evidence that the United States is seeing an "alarming" and "undemocratic" trend of "criminalizing peaceful protests." They cite, for example, proposed laws in Minnesota, Michigan, and Iowa that would toughen penalties for blocking traffic. You might be forgiven for asking: Since when has it been a right to imprison innocent bystanders in their cars for hours on end? But for the U.N. this

is the very definition of "peaceful protest"—crazy as that definition may be, certain friends of New Jersey governor Chris Christie might find it useful upon appeal.

The U.N. experts also fret about a Missouri attempt to criminalize protesting while wearing a mask—disregarding the fact that masked rioters are anything but peaceful. Such laws are already on the books in many states, a vestige of the bad old days when the main masked marauders were the Ku Klux Klan. But mask-wearing is now a human right—at



TMS PHOTO COLLAGE / DAVID LEVINE; SETH GOLDSTEIN

least as long as the masked people engaged in violent protest are doing so in opposition to Donald Trump.

The U.N. would no doubt feel obliged to correct THE SCRAPBOOK on that point. “There can be no such thing in law as a violent protest,” they say. “There are violent *protesters*, who should be dealt with individually,” they explain. Are they special rapporteurs on sophistry as well? ◆

## Muy Maravilloso

These are fraught days for the superhero business. Consider the rebooted Wonder Woman franchise. Feminists saw the movie trailer and promptly decried not the sexist notion that a Hun-killing demigoddess would cavort in a strapless bustier but that the actress playing the Amazonian princess had shaved under her arms.

As those great philosophers David St. Hubbins and Nigel Tufnel said, there’s a fine line between stupid and clever. That goes double when dealing with those modern obsessions, gender and race. Even when it’s just the stuff of comic books.

The hipsters and delayed adolescents among us will know all about Marvel Comics’ ongoing efforts to diversify its lineup of superheroes: a black female Iron Man, a biracial Spider-Man, the teenage Muslim Ms. Marvel, and America Chavez, now “the first lesbian Latina superhero,” as CNN puts it, who “attends Sotomayor University, and between classes, . . . picks fights with evil aliens.” (We’ll give them the benefit of the doubt that they’re talking about *space* aliens.)

But are you familiar with the company’s latest action hero? His secret identity is the decidedly unflashy David Gabriel, but his alter-ego is “Marvel’s Vice President of Sales.” His superpower is nothing so commonplace as invisibility, heat vision, or telekinesis. Gabriel has the remarkable ability—without even don-

ning cape or mask—to question the commercial appeal of his company’s ethnically and sexually diverse characters and yet emerge unscathed from the cauldron of modern identity politics. Amazing!

Just watch him in action, saying the unsayable: “What we heard was that people didn’t want any more diversity,” Gabriel recently told retailers, according to *Entertainment Weekly*. “They didn’t want female characters out there. . . . We had a lot of fresh, new, exciting ideas that we were trying to get out and nothing new really worked.”

The hordes of the Twitter underworld attacked, but Gabriel escaped, Mystique-style, by quickly shape-shifting. In a superhuman follow-up statement, he said, “Contrary to what some said about characters ‘not working,’” (you have to love that *some said*) “our fans and retailers ARE excited about these new heroes. And let me be clear, our new heroes are not going anywhere! We are proud and excited to keep introducing unique characters that reflect new voices and new experiences.”

The success of new characters turns in part on zippy superhero names, and we’re not convinced “Marvel’s Vice President for Sales” does justice to this exciting new Gabriel character. How about, instead, “Flak-Catcher”? ◆

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## Play Ball

Until opening day, I was wondering what to do with all the extra time that Major League Baseball's new "Pace of Play" rules were supposed to free up. The commissioner's office and the rules committee wanted to move the game along faster, presumably to appeal to baseball fans with lots of other demands on their attention. So managers now have only 30 seconds to decide if they're going to challenge a play, and replay "officials" must decide the outcome within two minutes. Most controversially, the intentional walk is now automatic: No need to watch the pitches sail high and wide, just trot to first base.

I figure that the classic four-pitch intentional walk averages about a minute and a half. I'm estimating it takes a minute to throw the four balls and adding another 30 seconds, since maybe 20 percent of intentional walks are preceded by a visit to the mound, where the pitching coach or manager decides to walk the batter. Let's say there's one intentional walk a game, though I acknowledge that might be high.

After all, Cubs ace Jon Lester has averaged only one intentional walk per 79 starts, or four during the 318 games he has appeared in over the course of his career. Max Scherzer of my hometown Washington Nationals averages one intentional walk in every 24 starts.

Of course, tactics change when the relief pitchers come in, as managers are more likely to tinker with matchups and more apt to walk runners intentionally. So I'm comfortable with estimating one intentional pass per game. With 2,430 games (162 games multiplied by 30 big league clubs) over the course of a sea-

son, that comes out to 3,645 minutes, or two and a half days. So, the new intentional walk rule is worth one long weekend a year.

But just as I was wondering how best to spend the long Intentional Walk Holiday weekend—exploiting my MLB.TV subscription or visiting a ballpark I'd never seen before,



*Wait, so that's how it's going to be now?*

like PNC in Pittsburgh—the season opened and I saw the new rule in action. And now I'm worried.

The Anaheim club was playing in Oakland and Angels superstar Mike Trout doubled to lead off the eighth. With Albert Pujols coming to the plate, the Oakland club chose to put the right-handed slugger on base, to set up the double-play with runners on first and second.

I'll let Trout take it from here with his postgame account. "I called timeout, got back to the bag, and when I looked up, he was on first base," Trout said. "It was different. He was

laughing. I was laughing. It took me a little bit to figure out what happened. But that's the way it's going, I guess."

No wonder Trout laughed nervously. Everything slows down for the superstars, who can see the stitches on a hard slider traveling upwards of 90 mph when they're at the plate, and in the field hear the crack of the bat and know instantly where the ball is going. And Trout sees where this is going.

Let me elaborate. Cardinals starter Adam Wainwright wondered recently on Twitter who would be the first major league pitcher to throw a two-pitch inning. Say the leadoff hitter swings at the first pitch and flies out. The team in the field signals for the number two hitter to take first base, without a pitch, and then the number three hitter grounds into an inning-ending double-play on one pitch.

It gets worse, much worse. Let's say that the "Pace of Play" initiative eventually incorporates the extra-inning protocol, now used in some of the minor leagues, where beginning with the 11th inning, the team at bat starts the inning with runners on first and second. Imagine that the team in the field gives an intentional walk to the leadoff batter to load the bases. The next hitter then grounds into a 5-4-3 triple play. That would be a one-pitch inning.

Or let's imagine the same setup. It's the bottom of the 11th and the pitcher balks with the bases loaded, and the runner on third comes home with the game-winning run. That's right, a no-pitch inning.

The no-pitch inning, and the eventual disappearance of pitches altogether, would be one of the signs of the apocalypse, presaging the end of baseball. The new intentional walk rule isn't speeding up baseball or saving time—it's creating a black hole that may well suck in the game itself. That's what Mike Trout saw, and it rattled him. It should alarm us all.

LEE SMITH

# Filibusted

One of the most tedious aspects of our politics is partisan battles over legislative procedure. To hear each side tell it, the opposition never hesitates to employ unprecedented tactics to further narrow political goals at great cost to the republic. Such arguments are almost always disingenuous. The two parties view legislative process as little more than a means to an end, and both can be counted on to do whatever they think they can get away with.

So it goes with the judicial filibuster, which was “nuked” (in the contemporary parlance) by Senate Republicans to confirm Judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. Democrats blasted this as a grave violation of the norms of the Senate, while Republicans responded that the Democrats set the upper chamber inexorably on this path when then-majority leader Harry Reid exercised the “nuclear option” and eliminated the filibuster for lower court and executive appointments.

This is just another iteration of a tired old game the two parties have been playing for decades, whereby each blames the other for the increasingly nasty process of confirming judicial nominees. Unfortunately, this partisan *Sturm und Drang* tells us hardly anything about why the Senate’s traditions regarding the judiciary have been laid waste. The only way to get the real answer is to turn the volume down on the jibber-jabbers and delve into postwar American political history.

When we do that, we find ourselves standing at the convergence of two trends, which combined have obliterated the old norms surrounding judicial confirmations.

First, the Supreme Court has taken it upon itself to stick its nose in all manner of issues that it had heretofore ignored. Gun control. Money in politics. Abortion. Gay rights. Sexual morality. Affirmative action. Law and order. Redistricting. Education. The list goes on and on. Judges of both ideological stripes seem to have an irrepressible desire to legislate from the bench, striking down laws because they violate some value that in the judicial mind must come before the will of the people, as expressed through their elected representatives. The reach of federal authority, moreover, has widened dramatically over the last few generations, meaning that federal courts are necessarily involved in all manner of questions that previously would not have been their domain.

As a result, the judiciary has become embroiled in the nation’s current *ideological* battle, particularly in the cultural

dimension, where compromises are much harder to come by. Little wonder, then, that conservatives and liberals believe that control of the courts is a prize well worth possessing—a view that their analogues in, say, the 1870s would not have held so firmly.

Second, the two parties have realigned along ideological lines. This has been a slow process, but a steady one since Franklin Roosevelt’s tenure, and it is nearly complete. Previously, the two parties had been predominantly separated along geographical, religious, and ethnic lines—with

the Democrats representing the segregationist South and urban Catholics, and the Republicans representing Northern Protestants. These divisions carried enormous meaning in their day, but they scrambled the ideological calculus—as somebody like Harry Byrd of Virginia could be a conservative Democrat and Edward Brooke of Massachusetts could be a liberal Republican. Those days are mostly gone. There are a few holdouts, for sure; Republican Susan Collins of Maine and Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia come to mind. These exceptions notwith-

standing, the Republican party is clearly the conservative party and the Democratic party obviously the liberal one.

This is an important development for understanding the evolution of Congress, which has almost from the start been organized along partisan lines. Because the parties were not conterminous with governing ideologies until recently, congressional organization has only lately come to reflect the left-right divide of contemporary discourse. This process began roughly 40 years ago, when liberal backbenchers in the House Democratic caucus began to seize power from conservative committee chairs. It has more or less reached its apogee, at least in the House.

The Senate, which has long relied on norms of deference, has been better able to avoid these developments. With its smaller membership and longer tenures, members of both parties have an incentive to eschew a daily ideological food fight for the sake of mutual accommodation. But the increasingly ideological tenor of the modern court has proven too much for even the upper chamber to ignore.

Indeed, the *demand* of grassroots groups on the left all but forced Minority Leader Charles Schumer to try to filibuster Judge Gorsuch, even though he surely understood it to be an unwinnable fight. If the shoe were on the other foot, Mitch



Mitch McConnell

McConnell would probably have done likewise. The Senate is still, in its way, organized along partisan lines and couldn't completely avoid being caught in the ideological whirlwind.

The breakdown of Senate tradition may leave the more nostalgic among us feeling morose, but there is nothing inherently wrong with this development. Legislative norms are no doubt useful and should not be cast aside for trivial reasons. But sometimes they *do* have to change.

In fact, the drama unfolding seems to be playing out in a way reminiscent of the projections that James Madison makes in *Federalist 51*, an essay that outlines how checks and balances are supposed to work. "Each department," Madison writes, must be given "the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack." Over the last 70 years, the courts—like everything else in our politics—have become increasingly ideological and are involving themselves in policy domains about which the people, and by extension their representatives in the Senate, care deeply. Why should senators sit idly by, when they have the means at their disposal to bend the courts to the whims of their constituents?

Put bluntly, the Supreme Court has become undoubtedly political. And while it can be a messy and ugly spectacle, politics is not necessarily a bad thing. Quite the contrary, the rough and tumble of politics is *essential* to republican government.

—Jay Cost

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## Swearing In

President Donald Trump certainly did his part in setting the table for the current state of public discourse. Make what you will of his agenda: His successful campaign has transformed the substance of political speech. This is an era when offhand vulgarity counts as straight talk; when "bomb the s— out of" ISIS becomes a policy plank; when George Carlin's "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" might as well be a consultant's handbook, for not only can you now say them on the stump, you are likely to lead the evening newscasts as a result. This is not about what was said in some bus on a Hollywood set 12 years ago. It is about taking such language to the lectern—mouthing the F-word or using slang for the female anatomy in a rally venue—and then arriving behind a podium embossed with the presidential seal.

But if Trump was a trendsetter, the trend is real, and he's far from alone. Four-letter words are now the terms with which we conduct significant debates. Obama Labor secretary Tom Perez adopted "No more bulls—" as a virtual yard

sign in his quest to become Democratic party chairman. He won. He recently told a gathering of activists in New Jersey that Republicans "don't give a s— about people." Provided the opportunity to comment, Perez's spokeswoman doubled down. "Tom Perez won't apologize for saying 'Republicans don't give a s— about people,'" the *Washington Post's* Dave Weigel tweeted. "Sorry not sorry," Perez replied—because if Democrats have learned anything in the last six months, it's that backing down is for losers.

The *Post* also noted that Perez has said Trump graduated from "Makin' S— Up University" and called the new White House's labor orders "bulls—." New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand would almost certainly agree, in violation of what might be branded her "help or go home" mantra. In a *New York* magazine profile published last week, the rising Democrat spoke about her effort to get moderate Republican Susan Collins of Maine to join a couple of her legislative causes. "I know Susan's worldview is similar to my worldview," she said. "Which is that we're here to help people, and if we're not helping people, we should go the f— home." Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your f—ing country, in other words.

Perez and Gillibrand have the bare restraints of being elected political figures to keep them from going too blue. Alex Jones does not. Fighting out of the red corner somewhere in outer space, the radio host and conspiracy theorist's ascendancy has paralleled Trump's—he interviewed the candidate for half an hour in December 2015 and said 90 percent of the millions in his audience supported Trump's campaign. Those folks were treated last week to what Jones cautioned was a rarity in his routine tirades: scattershot expletives, these directed at Democrat and House Intelligence Committee ranking member Adam Schiff. He packed 24 swears into 75 seconds. And somewhere, Joe Pesci blushes.

The issue with such crude vocabulary becoming prevalent in the public square is not its inherent nastiness: American politics has thrived without comity for about 230 years. (It was in 1788 that Patrick Henry warned Virginia against picking James Madison for the Senate because his "election would terminate in producing rivulets of blood throughout the land." Madison finished third.) Rather, the issue is precision. A coarse and ineloquent language might be able to leverage the public's emotions into electoral victory. But it is utterly ill-equipped to do effectively what comes next.

It's difficult by default to forge compromise on complex matters like health care, which feature slates of jargon that officials are forced to distill for public consumption. The task is even tougher when one party begins warning of "death panels" and the other depicts Republicans pushing grandmother off a cliff. Any hopes of accord are eroded completely once prominent figures purposely head for the gutter. Vulgar insults help fast-track the process to its conclusion.

—Chris Deaton

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# The AP's Pronoun Decree

Everyone can now do as they please.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Just who does they think they is? That's the question that raced through the language snob community late last month. Maybe not phrased in those exact words.

We was—no, we *were*—reacting to a bit of shoptalk from the editors of *The Associated Press Stylebook*. The importance and influence of *The AP Stylebook* extend far beyond the wire service's own wordslingers. It is one of the last, widely cited arbiters of what's good English and what ain't, now that most traditional style books, such as *The Elements of Style* and Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, have been ruled out of court by our cutting-edge grammarians as much too bossy.

Revisions are made to the stylebook every year, and now, with a digital edition, even oftener than that, allowing it to absorb the innovations of our lovely, ever-living language. The big news in this year's revision involved pronouns. There are people who get very hot over the subject of pronouns, and the editors of the stylebook weigh their views carefully when the issue is raised.

The 2016 edition, like every edition before it, held to a set of pronoun rules that is centuries old, tracing back to the early days of Middle English. Like most rules, they were commonly violated, sometimes through carelessness, sometimes on purpose, sometimes by reckless tradesmen who should know better (me).

Still, *The AP Stylebook* has been unyielding, and the 2016 edition asserted its judgments on pronouns with rare and admirable vigor. The

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distinction between “every one and everyone” was elegantly drawn. You should use “two words when it means each individual item: *Every one of the clues was worthless.*” It should appear as “one word when used as a pronoun meaning all persons: *Everyone wants his life to be happy.*”

The important point, for our pres-



What's that? It's them.

ent purposes, is that the 2016 stylebook considered *everyone*, whether one word or two, to be singular. Everyone knows this to be true; after all, we don't say “everyone know this to be true.” For that reason it requires a singular pronoun, *his*. In such contexts *his* has traditionally been taken as a gender-neutral pronoun encompassing both men and women. In *Everyone wants his life to be happy*, for example, the subject *everyone*, which here serves as the antecedent, must agree with the verb *wants*, and both must agree with the pronoun *his*.

And when you're dealing with plural words, things work the same way.

“*Their*,” said the old stylebook, “is a plural possessive pronoun and must agree in number with the antecedent.”

Then it offered a pair of examples to illustrate the point. “Wrong: *Everyone raised their hands*. Right: *They raised their hands.*”

Well, that was then, and this is now. Who knew we would ever have reason to miss the year 2016? We're only four months into 2017, and the editors of the stylebook have already rendered last year's edition obsolete, a token of a vanished age—at least when it comes to the plural pronoun, which isn't plural anymore.

In the new edition, that muscular, unambiguous sentence cited above (“*Their* is a plural possessive pronoun and must agree in number with the antecedent”) has been stricken from the stylebook. Now the sentence, the rule itself, has disappeared—gone, vanished, poof, like those Communist functionaries who'd get scrubbed from official photographs when they got crossways with Stalin.

In its place, the editors have concocted this: “In most cases, a plural pronoun should agree in number with the antecedent: The children love the books their uncle gave them. *They/ them/their* is acceptable in limited cases as a singular and-or gender-neutral pronoun, when alternative wording is overly awkward or clumsy.”

They offered two reasons for their decision. We will take them in order.

First: The editors, in a press release, said they were merely recognizing “that the spoken language uses *they* as singular.” In truth, the language doesn't use anything. What they meant was lots and lots of American English-speakers, probably a majority, use *they* as singular—freely, wantonly, unrestrained by fear of contradiction. *The student needs to improve their grade if they want to graduate*. So promiscuous has the singular *they* become that serious discussions are now had over which of these horrors is preferable: *The student hurt themselves* or *The student hurt theirselves*.

Here the stylebook editors find

themselves on a battlefield of the familiar, endless, and deceptively important war between prescriptivists and descriptivists. In practice, prescriptivists favor traditional rules of usage and grammar, while descriptivists, in their more unguarded moments, seem to disfavor the very idea of rules. At best, when descriptivists refer to rules at all, it is to discredit them or dismantle them, on the grounds that no one is following them anyway. Thus the distinction, for example, between *lie* and *lay*, which so few English speakers recognize or observe, is discarded as obsolete for precisely that reason. The great copy editor Theodore Bernstein of the *New York Times*—yes, there are copy editors worthy to be called great!—defined descriptivism as “the odd belief that if a crime is committed often enough it should become legal.”

A stylebook like the AP’s is by nature prescriptivist. It settles disputes by laying down the law; the distinction between *lay* and *lie* continues to shine forth from its pages like a beacon of all that is good and true. But when the editors approve the singular *they* on the grounds that it’s widely used, they strike a blow for the descriptivists—although, as we’ll see, descriptivists often have trouble taking yes for an answer.

On its face the dispute looks like a contest between free-thinking democrats, champions of the common folk, and judgmental, authoritarian prigs. Any right-thinker will immediately know which side they should take. Nowadays it’s the descriptivists who defend the status quo—descriptivism is the reigning orthodoxy among the highest-ranking lexicographers and grammarians in publishing and the universities—and it’s the contrarians who find themselves defending tradition. But the dispute is a little subtler than that.

Scratch a prescriptivist, then scratch him again, and you will find a few descriptivist sympathies rolling around in there somewhere. Even the stuffiest prescriptivist knows that a language is an organic creation,

needing to grow and change, open to freshets of innovation from whatever direction. The real difference is that while the descriptivist approves whatever new practice is coming from vox populi, the prescriptivist wants the language’s growth and change to be in the direction of simplicity and clarity, away from pretense and obfuscation. It’s hard to argue that confusing *lay* for *lie*, or the plural for the singular, is a move toward greater clarity.

In the same way, descriptivists, like their progressive brethren in politics and elsewhere, can sometimes be very prescriptive. They render thunderous judgments from which there

**The long march to approval of the singular *they* began in modern feminism. Activists rejected the idea that *he* could be used as a gender-neutral pronoun without implying an anti-woman bias. That *he* had been used to mean ‘he or she’ for many centuries only confirmed the feminist argument, feminists said; the gender-neutral *he* was a tool of oppression.**

is no appeal, with a vehemence that might make a prescriptivist blush. It’s a mistake to call them “relativists,” as some prescriptivists disparagingly do. Their anathemas are absolute. The linguist Geoffrey Pullum, a short-fused descriptivist and author of *A Student’s Introduction to English Grammar*, calls the insistence that “they” have a plural antecedent “an old chestnut” and “a familiar prejudice.” He thus invokes two things, “old” and “prejudiced,” that no one wants to be.

Consider, he says, a sentence like *No one ever thinks they are personally responsible*. To a prescriptivist the error is obvious, even if everyone commits it now and then—or even, in the case of most people, constantly. (Descriptivists like to argue

that a rule is invalid if Jane Austen, Shakespeare, or some other master broke it once upon a time. This is the strangest argument from authority ever heard of: If Shakespeare did it, it cannot be a mistake.) The sentence, the prescriptivist says, is literally incoherent because it’s internally contradictory. The first verb (*thinks*) indicates a singular subject, and then, just a few words down, the next verb (*are*) indicates a plural subject, even though it’s the same subject fore and aft. Somewhere between the start of the sentence and its end, the singular suddenly had twins or triplets.

The incoherence is nicely, if unintentionally, expressed in the AP press release: “When ‘they’ is singular it takes a plural verb.” The singular, in other words, is plural, except when it’s singular. Nevertheless, Pullum says, “Such sentences are fully natural and acceptable.” Like some prescriptivists, he uses the tone of the papal bull, making a flat declaration of what is “acceptable.” And what is unacceptable: “Calling them incorrect,” he writes, “is delusional.” Look who’s getting judgmental all of a sudden.

The long march to approval of the singular *they* began in modern feminism. Activists rejected the idea that *he* could be used as a gender-neutral pronoun without implying an anti-woman bias. That *he* had been used to mean “he or she” for many centuries only confirmed the feminist argument, feminists said; the gender-neutral *he* was a tool of oppression. For reasons of cultural politics, then, enlightened persons began, rather ostentatiously, to use *he or she* where the gender neutral *he* had once been used. It wasn’t long before good writers and editors began noticing the new construction was unwieldy and inelegant, especially with frequent repetition. The next idea was to randomly alternate between *he* and *she* as the gender-neutral pronoun, sometimes in the same paragraph. Even the descriptivist writer Henry Hitchings found this usage to be “arch.” Stuck in a cul de sac of their own making, descriptivists still insist there’s no going back to *he*. So *they* it is—an

excellent example of how even the most well-meaning reforms can force people to talk balls.

I mentioned that the AP editors cited two reasons for their (halfhearted) endorsement of the singular *they*. The first, even with its progressive overtones, might be called the descriptivist cave-in. The second cave-in is to cultural politics. “We also recognize,” the press release said, “the need for a pronoun for people who don’t identify as a he or a she.”

Even friendly demographers put the percentage of transgendered persons at less than one-half of 1 percent of the American population. Among that .4 percent, people who think they are neither male nor female constitute a vanishingly small portion. Even so, they have become an enthusiasm of young journalists, who have been trained to assume that some shocking and inhumane form of discrimination is always being committed out there in the country at large. The “non-binary” make a fine object for their rescue efforts. The stylebook could scarcely accommodate the cause without a pronoun to go with it. And so *they* has to be singular.

The change in the stylebook hasn’t been enough to satisfy some activists or reporters. (If you aren’t satisfied with either masculinity or femininity, you are by definition hard to please.) The news service of the Poynter Institute, the trade group of establishment journalism, warmly endorsed the stylebook change. But its story also quoted Tiffany Stevens, a reporter for the *Roanoke Times*, who “is non-binary and uses the singular ‘they’ pronoun.” While welcoming this “small” step on the part of the AP, Stevens complained that the stylebook didn’t go far enough. It still left room for people to think that the singular *they* was grammatically incorrect. The Poynter story continues:

“That’s just being a frustrating stickler for grammar, which changes every century,” they said. “At worst, it’s erasure.”

You see what they did there. ◆

# Senator on the Rise

Tom Cotton asserts himself on health care.

BY FRED BARNES

At 39, Tom Cotton is the youngest member of the Senate. He was elected from Arkansas in 2014 after two years in the House. And having served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan as an infantry captain, he quickly emerged as an influential senator on military and foreign affairs.



Now he’s taken on health care and aims to create a consensus among Republican senators on the best way to repeal and replace Obamacare. It’s an ambitious task, especially for someone whose experience with the issue is not extensive.

Yet he stepped up as the most

forceful GOP senator in opposition to the bill favored by President Donald Trump and House speaker Paul Ryan. When their bill failed to attract a majority in the House, his role as a key player on health care got a enormous boost.

Cotton didn’t like the Trump-Ryan plan from the moment he read it. “The bill wouldn’t work,” he says. “It wouldn’t reduce premiums.” Instead, by letting premiums rise in the first two years, it would have jeopardized Republican chances in the 2018 midterm election and the 2020 presidential race, he insists.

This is no small point. The measure rejected in the House is now being modified to eliminate premium hikes. Cotton says this can be done by wiping away Obamacare’s insurance regulations, especially the one requiring all policies to include 10 “essential benefits.”

While Cotton and Ryan agree on the goal of a health care system that’s patient-oriented and driven by free market incentives, their argument over the failed bill has delighted the media. This was the headline of a *Politico* story: “Cotton goes after Ryan agenda in battle of GOP heavyweights.”

Indeed, Cotton has been harsh in his criticism. He attacked the three-phase process in the Ryan plan. It is “nothing but politician’s talk,” he told *Politico*. “It’s all talk.” At one point, he said House Republicans should slow down and start over in drafting the bill to replace Obamacare.

When I interviewed Cotton last week, he didn’t let up in his criticism. Ryan’s third phase consists of legislative steps to improve the replacement to Obamacare. Doing so would require help from Democrats in

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THOMAS FLUHARTY

the Senate to overcome a filibuster.

Cotton doubts the votes of eight Democrats, the necessary number, would materialize. If that many Senate Democrats are available, they should be recruited now, he suggested. With them on board, there's no reason to use the stringent reconciliation process to get repeal and replace through the Senate, he said. A filibuster could be thwarted and full repeal passed by a simple majority.

In Ryan's defense, he believes some Democrats will be open to a fresh approach once Obamacare is dead and gone. At that point, they would be willing to vote for popular measures to improve the Republican replacement.

He and Cotton agree on removing the "essential benefits" regulation, but would tackle it in different ways. With Ryan's encouragement, Freedom Caucus conservatives and Tuesday Group moderates agreed to let each state decide on the required benefits. Cotton would eliminate them outright.

A factor in Cotton's emergence is

his relationship with Trump. He didn't endorse Trump during the primaries. This was because several of his Senate colleagues and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee were running for the GOP nomination.

**A factor in Cotton's emergence is his relationship with Trump. He didn't endorse Trump during the primaries, but he wasn't hostile to Trump, either.**

But Cotton was not hostile to Trump. In fact, he was the first person who mentioned to me last year that Trump was viewed favorably by a group of conservative intellectuals, some at the Claremont Institute in California. Cotton studied at Claremont under Charles Kesler, the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*.

In March of last year, Cotton joined

Trump at a crucial meeting in Washington. It was called to discuss how Trump might handle the nomination of a successor to the late Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia. Trump asked for a list of conservative jurists from which he might select a nominee. Neil Gorsuch, then a federal appeals court judge, was on the list.

When the raunchy *Access Hollywood* recording was leaked last October, Cotton didn't abandon Trump. Cotton urged him "to throw himself on the mercy of the American people. . . . He needs to take full responsibility for his words and his behavior, he needs to beg their forgiveness, and he needs to finally change his ways."

If he were to balk, Cotton said, "then he should step aside and allow the Republican party to replace him with an elder statesman." Trump basically followed Cotton's advice during his second debate with Hillary Clinton. Ryan was tougher, saying he would no longer defend Trump, though he didn't withdraw his endorsement

## Torts and Rules Can Stunt Tech Sector Growth

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

New innovations and technologies are fertile ground for economic growth. They lead to startup companies, job creation, and a rush of capital and investment. But once a technology gets big, it's never long before government regulators and aggressive trial lawyers swoop in to crash the party. Hasty regulations and expansive liability stunt the sector's growth and slam the brakes on job creation.

When startups and emerging industries are forced to wade through a thicket of new rules or defend against meritless litigation, guess what they can't do? Innovate. And considering the pace of technological advancement today, standing still is the same as falling behind. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce established C\_TEC, the Chamber Technology Engagement Center, to help tech companies navigate these thorny—and often undefined—

policy, legal, and regulatory issues. One of the center's main objectives is to serve as a convener, bringing together entrepreneurs and government leaders to shape the outcomes of technology policy debates.

C\_TEC and the U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform recently hosted an event in Silicon Valley focusing on the liability ramifications of emerging technologies. Exciting growth occurs in the new and unregulated spaces of our economy, but we also know that the right legal and regulatory framework plays an important role in making new technologies safe and secure. To discover how to strike the right balance, the event featured three panels on growing sectors of the tech economy: drones, the Internet of Things, and autonomous vehicles. Each panel considered mounting liability issues and discussed how to fend off excessive litigation and rushed regulation.

The panelists raised the question of who is responsible when a driverless

car causes a wreck. Outsize liability in the autonomous vehicle space, particularly during development, could seriously undermine the growth of this technology. Numerous privacy issues related to the Internet of Things were also discussed. How much personal data is the wearable tech on your wrist or the smart security system in your home allowed to store or transmit? The safety issues involving drones, especially as related to the new regulatory framework, also provoked interesting conversation.

These questions and countless others involving new technologies are more than just abstract legal debates; they affect the future of our economy and job creation. The Chamber doesn't have all the answers, but we can help move the dialogue forward by convening leaders from industry, government, and law to examine the issues and explore solutions.



Learn more at  
[uschamber.com/abovethefold](http://uschamber.com/abovethefold).

of him as the Republican nominee.

Cotton talks frequently to Trump. They haven't discussed health care, but I'm told they talk about many "other things." And Cotton's advice is sought by cabinet members, particularly on foreign policy and military issues. That he is well-liked by Trump adds to his influence.

Last week, Cotton was in demand by TV news shows to talk about Syria and China. He's smart, decisive in his views, and knowledgeable. There aren't many Republicans who can handle questions on foreign and military issues as convincingly as Cotton.

In the meantime, there's health care to deal with. It won't take a miracle to bring together Republican senators on a package of ideas that amount to a consensus. And Cotton is also eager to gain the support of health care experts from think tanks. In Washington, their opinions matter. Most of them were critical of the Trump-Ryan bill.

In its broadest terms, Cotton's objective on health care is "to help those who were hurt by Obamacare while not hurting those who were helped by it." He says far more were hurt than helped. Trump and Ryan would agree with that. ◆

private individuals and corporations.

"It's like criminal libel—the statutes exist, but prosecutions under them are very rare," says Eugene Volokh, a University of California, Los Angeles, law professor whose specialty is the First Amendment's protections for freedom of speech and religion. "There's such a thing as prosecutorial discretion. The fact that government can do something doesn't mean the government always does it."

Daleiden, 28, is a veteran of the California-based anti-abortion organization Live Action, whose founder, Lila Rose, posed as a teenage abortion-seeker during the mid-2000s to uncover alleged legal violations at Planned Parenthood clinics in the Los Angeles area. He formed his own anti-abortion group, the Center for Medical Progress, in 2013 and embarked on an elaborate sting operation investigating the alleged selling of organs of aborted fetuses at Planned Parenthood clinics across the country. Planned Parenthood is America's largest abortion provider, its clinics accounting for about a third of the 926,000 reported legal abortions performed in 2014.

In order to gain access to abortion providers' conventions as well as street cred with Planned Parenthood executives, Daleiden created a fictitious fetal-tissue supply company, BioMax Procurement Services, complete with its own website, and obtained California driver's licenses under the fictitious names he created for himself and Merritt, who is in her mid-60s. He learned the ins and outs of the fetal-tissue business by using a former employee's password to access an email account of StemExpress Biomedical Supply, a Placerville, California, fetal-tissue supplier and then-partner of Planned Parenthood. Daleiden and Merritt set up a BioMax vendor's booth at a National Abortion Federation convention in San Francisco in April 2014 and arranged meetings at restaurants with Planned Parenthood officials, who freely discussed abortion procedures and tissue-supply arrangements with their supposed would-be customers. Daleiden and Merritt secretly recorded the conversations.

# Journalists in the Dock

Thou shalt not investigate Planned Parenthood.

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

**O**n March 28 California attorney general Xavier Becerra threw the book at anti-abortion activists David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt. The penal code book, that is. Becerra's office charged the pair, famous for their undercover Planned Parenthood recordings, with 14 felony violations of California Penal Code Section 632, which forbids recording confidential private communications, plus a single count of criminal conspiracy. If the pair are convicted, each could wind up serving around 15 years in prison and paying close to \$40,000 in fines.

There is much to be observed about this move on the part of Becerra, a former Democratic congressman from Los Angeles who was appointed to the state's top law enforcement post after its previous Democratic occupant, Kamala Harris—who had begun the criminal investigation of Daleiden and Merritt—was elected to the U.S. Senate.

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But one of the most salient observations is this: Becerra is one lucky prosecutor. Although nearly all states have anti-eavesdropping laws on their books that bar such devices as recorders and hidden cameras placed by third parties, in most of those states and in the District of Columbia people are free to record their own conversations with others without obtaining consent. California is one of only eleven states with a "two-party" anti-recording law. California requires "all parties to a confidential communication" to consent before the conversation can be filmed or recorded.

Becerra is also one aggressive prosecutor: Criminal prosecutions under that law appear to be relatively rare. Criminal prosecutions of journalists, whether they work for recognized media outlets or are self-described citizen-journalists like Daleiden and Merritt, appear to be rarer still. Nearly all the court rulings interpreting Section 632 involve civil lawsuits for damages brought by

In July 2015 the Center for Medical Progress started releasing the videos. Their contents, augmented by consented-to recordings of interviews with former Planned Parenthood and StemExpress employees, were shocking. They revealed Planned Parenthood executives seemingly outlining special—and especially grisly—abortion techniques that would keep fetal organs intact while crushing limbs (raising ethical questions about informed patient consent) and seemingly haggling over appropriate reimbursement to Planned Parenthood clinics. In perhaps the most notorious of the tapes, Dr. Deborah Nucatola, then Planned Parenthood’s senior director for medical services, boasted, “We’ve been very good at getting heart, lung, liver,” while sipping wine and nibbling on a lunchtime salad. In another, Dr. Mary Gatter, a Los Angeles OB/GYN and president of Planned Parenthood’s medical directors’ council, joked, “I want a Lamborghini” when discussing the compensation Planned Parenthood ought to receive for processing and shipping the fetal body parts.

Planned Parenthood countered that the videotapes had been heavily and misleadingly edited. Daleiden later released the dozens of hours of unedited tapes, and while Fusion GPS, a Washington-based oppo-research team hired by Planned Parenthood to examine the edited videos, deemed them “useless” as evidence in legal proceedings, they concluded that the videos had not been tampered with manually and “analysis did not reveal widespread evidence of substantive video manipulation.” The idea that the tapes had been deceptively edited has nonetheless persisted in the Planned Parenthood-friendly liberal media.

Still, the tapes caused no end of embarrassment for Planned Parenthood and also for StemExpress, whose customers are typically university researchers. The Center for Medical Progress released, in August 2015, a video of another wine-sipping restaurant interview, this one with Cate Dyer, who founded StemExpress in

2010 and served as its CEO. Dyer noted that she could use another “50 livers a week” from a “volume institution” such as Planned Parenthood.

On August 14, 2015, StemExpress terminated its partnership with Planned Parenthood while insisting it had done nothing improper. On October 13, 2015, Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards announced that her organization would stop taking money of any kind for fetal tissue and would simply donate the organs directly for research.



David Daleiden, center, speaks after turning himself in to authorities in Houston, February 4, 2016.

Trafficking in human body parts is a federal felony, but despite Daleiden’s efforts, it has so far proved impossible to make a legal case that Planned Parenthood clinics sold fetal organs for a profit, in contrast to receiving relatively modest reimbursements to cover their processing costs. Some 12 states, most of them headed by Republican governors, launched investigations prompted by the videos’ allegations. Nearly all came up empty-handed, although Florida uncovered instances of improper record-keeping concerning fetal remains, and three Planned Parenthood clinics in that state were fined for performing second-trimester abortions when it was licensed only for first-trimester abortions. Investigations in Arizona and Louisiana are apparently still ongoing.

An investigation ordered by Dan Patrick, Texas’s Republican lieutenant governor, went awry in January 2016, when a Harris County grand jury decided to take no action against

Planned Parenthood and instead indict Daleiden and Merritt, charging them with felony tampering with government records (their fake driver’s licenses) and a misdemeanor count of illegally trafficking in human organs via BioMax. A judge threw out that latter charge in June 2016, and the following month the district attorney’s office withdrew the felony count on a legal technicality. That effectively ended the pair’s Texas prosecution.

Meanwhile Daleiden and Merritt have been the target of civil litigation by some of the taped parties. StemExpress was the first to file, in July 2015, in an effort to obtain an injunction barring the release of the Dyer video. The suit alleged that the company had violated Section 632 in its undercover videotaping and had also interfered with StemExpress’s tissue-procurement business. A Los Angeles County superior court judge denied the injunction, citing the center’s free-speech rights under the First Amendment. In August 2015 the National Abortion Federation sued the center alleging violations of federal

anti-racketeering statutes and related offenses in the federal district court in San Francisco, where the center’s videotaping at the 2014 convention had taken place. (Daleiden and Merritt had also videotaped conversations at the federation’s 2015 convention.) They also sought an injunction that would bar Daleiden from releasing the convention tapes. This time a federal judge upheld the injunction, pointing out that Daleiden had waived his First Amendment rights by signing a confidentiality agreement with the federation that barred the recording of any convention proceedings. On March 29, the day after Becerra filed his 15 felony charges, the famously liberal 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals refused to dislodge that lower-court ruling, rejecting arguments by the center’s lawyers that the injunction amounted to an unconstitutional prior restraint on free speech.

The California prosecution will undoubtedly hinge on the factual

BOB LEVEY / AP

question of whether the abortion providers were engaged in a “confidential communication” when they talked to Daleiden and Merritt. The statute defines “confidential communication” to exclude “a communication made in a public gathering,” so you might think Daleiden’s choice of public spaces for videotaping—restaurants and conventions—would spare him the brunt of the law.

Not necessarily so. Under the California supreme court’s leading decision interpreting Section 632, *Flanagan v. Flanagan* (2002), the standard is simply whether the recorded party “had an objectively reasonable expectation that the conversation is not being overheard or recorded,” period. That ruling is going to make it difficult, although perhaps not insurmountably difficult, for the two to mount a defense.

So what is left? There is the question of selective prosecution. It’s clear that Becerra’s multiple felony charges are unusual in the world of Section 632 litigation. *Flanagan v. Flanagan* is typical of the case-law: It involved a domestic dispute in which the second wife of a rich man recorded phone conversations between her husband and a son by his first wife who was convinced that the second wife had tried to hasten the death of her cancer-stricken husband in order to collect an inheritance. Some of the court opinions interpreting Section 632 involve undercover recording by journalists, but they all seem to be civil cases. “I don’t know of any journalists being criminally charged,” says Michael E. Kraut, a veteran criminal-defense lawyer in Los Angeles. Kraut said that he’d represented defendants facing criminal counts alleging illegal recording under Section 632, but “they’re usually people involved in a family situation or a business dealing.”

Indeed, in 2014 and 2015 an animal-rights organization, Mercy for Animals, surreptitiously videotaped incidents of alleged cruelty to chickens and ducks on California poultry farms. There was never any thought of a criminal prosecution of the group; the

ensuing investigations were directed at the farms in question.

Furthermore, Section 632 is a “wobbler” statute in criminal-law jargon, which means that the prosecutor can choose to treat violations as either misdemeanors or felonies. Becerra chose the latter and piled on the counts. For this reason, a surprising range of liberal media pundits—*Slate*’s Mark Joseph Stern, *Mother Jones*’s Kevin Drum, and the *Los Angeles Times* editorial board—who have zero sympathy for anti-abortion activists and who believe with the fervor of religious converts that the Center for Medical Progress videos were deceptively edited have strongly criticized Becerra’s crusade, which implicitly threatens all undercover journalism. The *Times* called it “disturbing overreach.” Drum wrote: “This was a legitimate investigation, and no level of government should be in the business of chilling it.”

Nonetheless, while selective prosecution may resonate emotionally, it’s “not an argument you can make in court,” says UCLA’s Volokh. “It’s not a legal argument.”

That goes in spades for journalists. The First Amendment protects the dissemination of news but not necessarily its gathering. Still, there are First Amendment defenses that can be mounted. Matthew Heffron, an Omaha-based former federal prosecutor who is working on Daleiden and Merritt’s defense team for the nonprofit Thomas More Society, called Becerra’s prosecution a “political show trial” and said there is a First Amendment concept called “viewpoint discrimination” in which “criminally prosecuting some expressions of political points of view but not others” could be unconstitutional.

“There is at least some constitutional protection” for undercover journalists who might break laws, says Alan Chen, a University of Denver law professor who has represented animal-rights activists fighting an “ag-gag” law in Idaho that forbids undercover videotaping of animal conditions on Idaho farms. “The court ruled that there is a limited First Amendment right to

record on issues of public significance,” Abortion is obviously one of those issues, Chen said, although he added the caveat that such factors as “misleading editing” and “contractual agreements” not to record could muddy the waters for Daleiden and Merritt.

On January 4 the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives released a 487-page report on the fetal-tissue procurement industry—sharply disputed by the panel’s Democratic minority—that in many ways validated the revelations of the Center for Medical Progress videotapes. The report, the result of interviewing numerous witnesses and reviewing subpoenaed documents, found evidence to support the following: that some Planned Parenthood affiliates had illegally realized profits on organ transfers by padding their expense invoices, that Planned Parenthood doctors had altered their abortion techniques to meet demands from tissue-supply firms, that Planned Parenthood’s consent forms were vague and tended to lead patients to believe that fetal tissue offered semi-miraculous disease cures, and that StemExpress and other tissue-procurement firms were reselling harvested organs at sky-high markups. The committee also stated that StemExpress might have destroyed documents that were the subject of the committee’s inquiries. A week after the committee released its report, StemExpress dropped its lawsuit against Daleiden and Merritt.

But that was the Republican Congress. California is California, and right now the state, except for a few rural corners, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Democratic party, with a veto-proof Democratic legislative majority. “I stand with Planned Parenthood” is the mantra of the state’s (Democratic) cultural moguls in Silicon Valley and Hollywood. In September 2016 California’s Democratic governor Jerry Brown signed into a law a bill making it illegal to distribute audio or video recordings of health care providers without their consent—a law designed to ensure that there will be no more Centers for Medical Progress. Good luck, David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt. ♦

# Simply Unpalatable

The main problem with school lunches.

BY TONY MECIA

Oh, what Bridget O'Brien Wood could do if the government allowed her just a little more salt. She could serve potato salad that isn't bland. She could experiment with curry sauces. And O'Brien Wood, food service director with Buffalo Public Schools, could finally tell parents that the French fries at lunch taste like the ones their kids gobble up at restaurants.

As it is, O'Brien Wood finds herself in a pickle: She has to serve foods that Buffalo's schoolchildren will eat, but in a way that complies with strict federal nutrition standards intended to combat childhood obesity.

Those standards have forced her and her colleagues to get creative. Not all attempts have worked. When they serve whole-grain spaghetti with meat sauce, some students eat only the meat sauce. When they brought in a local chef to prepare shepherd's pie that met the requirements by including turnips and other root vegetables, most kids wouldn't touch it. Fruit, salad bars, and potatoes have been hits. But other veggies, like oven-baked sweet potato fries, are a tough sell because of clampdowns on sodium.

"You put a little salt on something, they'll eat it," she says. "The vegetables are the new challenge. Just that little bit of extra salt makes all the difference in the world."

Around the country, school officials are contending with the effects of the regulations—effects that differ from the ones policymakers intended when the rules went into force five years ago. Some teachers have said students return from lunch hungry. Administrators say they're concerned with wasted food. And though it's early in this grand experiment to improve

the dietary habits of the country's children, there's little proof that it is actually accomplishing its goals. For all the work done in Washington to ensure healthy food is served on school cafeteria trays—and there are pages upon pages of regulations, menu guides, and Department of Agriculture interpretations—policymakers have still not figured out what most parents learn the hard way: You can't force picky eaters to consume food they find unappealing.

"It's not nutritious," O'Brien Wood says, "if they never eat it."



*Federally compliant lunch in Clinton, Mississippi: a flatbread roast beef sandwich, applesauce, chocolate milk, and a cookie*

The food fight could be about to get messy, ahead of even more stringent restrictions on sodium levels due to kick in this summer. Congress has debated relaxing the rules in the last few years, but previous efforts failed against Obama administration opposition. The issue seems to be small potatoes to the Trump administration, which hasn't taken a stand. But interest groups are weighing in. On one side are health advocates, including anti-hunger groups and the American Heart Association, who want the regulations maintained. On the other side, though, are groups on the front lines of the healthy-eating battle: trade groups representing school boards, school superintendents, and school-meal planners. They hope to undo some of the mandates while saying they support the larger health goals.

It's part of a continuing struggle pitting local control against the strings that come with taking federal money. Lunch menus are the latest way that schools are being asked to shoulder greater responsibility for thorny societal issues, much as they have been enlisted in efforts to combat teen pregnancy, drug use, and racial housing patterns.

Although some states and local districts have been running lunch programs for more than a century, federal school lunches trace their roots to the Great Depression. The Agriculture Department bought crops to prop up farm prices and sent the food to schools. In 1946, seeking to provide some stability to fluctuating crop purchases, Congress provided consistent money to states to help them establish school lunch programs.

By 2010, the federal school lunch program had grown into a \$10 billion colossus feeding 32 million schoolchildren, two-thirds of whom were poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Pushed by first lady Michelle Obama as part of her campaign against childhood obesity, the Democratic Congress pumped \$4.5 billion more into the program and laid the groundwork for updated nutritional standards. Any school that accepts federal lunch money has to abide by the healthy food rules.

"When our kids spend so much of their time each day in school, and when many children get up to half their daily calories from school meals, it's clear that we as a nation have a responsibility to meet as well," Michelle Obama said at the bill's signing ceremony, adding, in a line that rankled conservative commentators, "We can't just leave it up to the parents."

When the Agriculture Department released its proposed nutrition rules the following year, local school lunch planners found them a tough nut to crack. The new regulations all but outlawed desserts, required all grains be whole grains, sharply cut sodium levels, made fruits or vegetables mandatory, and imposed calorie limits on meals. Some schools couldn't figure out how they could possibly make it all palatable.

ROGELIO V. SOLIS / AP

*Tony Mecia is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

“Kids will eat only the foods they like, regardless,” wrote one food-service manager in Wichita, Kansas, in response to the new rules. “I think we do an excellent job of finding that balance between what a student will eat and what we offer. . . . Please do NOT make my job even harder than it already is with your high ideas and no way to implement them in a way that will work. I know I am just a little food service manager who you think knows nothing—but words are easy to say and very easy to make into law. Forcing kids to eat green broccoli is not easy at all!!!!”

Since the rules took effect in 2012, results seem mixed at best. Pro-regulation groups report, anecdotally, that in some cases, children are trying the new, healthier foods. A handful of small studies have found that students are putting more fruits and vegetables on their trays—which is unsurprising, because that is now required—but it is unclear whether overall consumption is up. One of those studies revealed that more than half of the vegetables on student trays wind up in the trash.

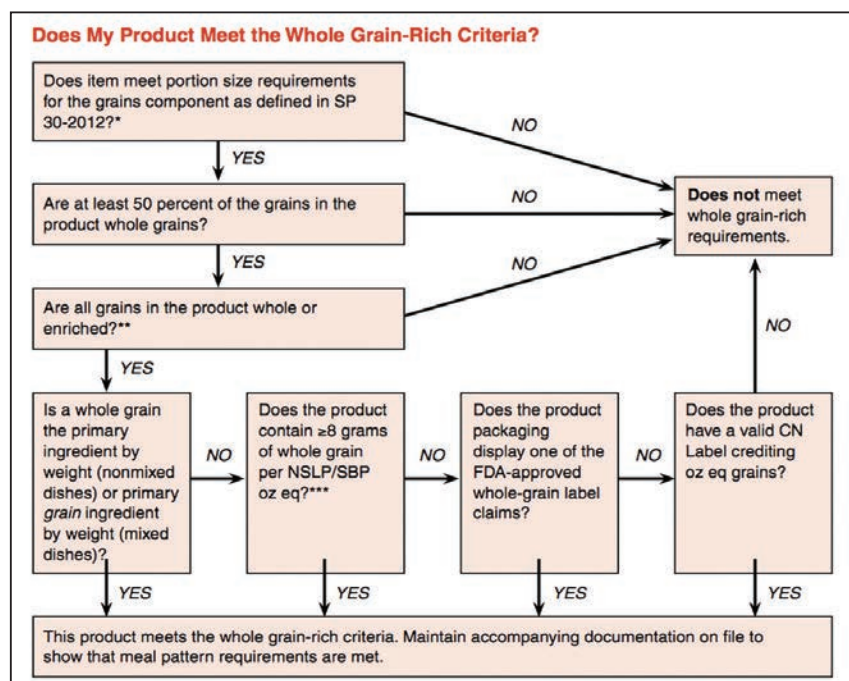
A 2014 poll by the Pew Charitable Trusts and other organizations favoring the Obama childhood health initiatives found that 72 percent of parents favor some kind of nutritional standards for school meals. A 2015 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though, found “no change in obesity prevalence” in comparing the years before the new standards took effect with those after. (About 17 percent of U.S. youth are obese.) Crystal FitzSimons with the Food Research & Action Center says it is too soon to draw meaningful conclusions: “It does take time to get kids to change their habits, but it’s an important shift.”

Another shift taking place since the new standards and resulting higher costs went into force: fewer lunches and fewer students served. Students taking heavily subsidized free and reduced-price lunches are up slightly, while the number of students buying lightly subsidized “paid lunches” is down by one-fifth since 2012. Experts say that’s because the nutritional standards have

driven up costs on food that paying students won’t buy. Some school districts are choosing to forgo the meager federal cafeteria subsidies on these lunches, freeing themselves from the nutritional standards and allowing them to offer lunches they can more easily sell. As a result, wealthier students are less likely to buy their lunches in a federally subsidized, healthy-food cafeteria than ever before. A record 73 percent of students participating in the federal school lunch program were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches in 2016, according to Agriculture Department data. In 1969, the figure was 15 percent.

kids “simply as hungry as they can be because they are not eating exactly what the lunchroom people are preparing.” She says she’s struck when she walks into churches and community organizations, and children are eating macaroni and cheese or Beefaroni. “I wonder how many of the folks in D.C. would like to eat the food without the seasoning and the salt,” she says.

In 2015, the president of the board of trustees of the Blackford County school system, south of Fort Wayne, Ind., testified to Congress that some students in his district “have been caught bringing—and even selling—salt, pep-



Around the country, schools are confronting a lot of challenges springing from the rules and are suggesting ways to make the standards more palatable. Diane Pratt-Heavner, spokeswoman for the School Nutrition Association, says the requirement for whole grains has led to some nontraditional takes on regional dishes, such as whole-wheat tortillas in the Southwest and whole-wheat biscuits in the South. She says her organization’s members would like the “flexibility to offer a white tortilla or white rice.”

Louise Radloff, school board chair of the Gwinnett County Public Schools outside Atlanta, says she sees

per, and sugar in school to add taste to perceived bland and tasteless cafeteria food.” He said some parents even check their kids out from school during lunch and take them home or to a fast-food restaurant to eat.

In Buffalo, O’Brien Wood says she doesn’t know what the solution is. She’d just like the freedom to spice up a menu that’s becoming “a little monotonous.”

“I know the good intention is there, that we want children to grow up and live healthy lives,” she says. “I get it. But if the goal was to get kids to eat more vegetables, we are having a hard time.” ♦

# Progressives, Inc.

The long march through the boardrooms.

BY JAMES PIERESON & NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

When Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation since 2013, called for a “reimagining of philanthropy’s first principles and its relationship to our market system,” few people thought this meant that he would join the board of directors of PepsiCo. But that’s exactly what he did last fall. Walker, who stands to make somewhere between a quarter and a half a million dollars a year in his new role, insisted he would introduce a distinctive view into Pepsi’s corporate deliberations: “I will bring my perspective as the leader of a social justice organization. . . . I will bring my perspective as someone who is deeply concerned about the welfare of people in poor and vulnerable communities.”

Some of Walker’s allies in the progressive community seem skeptical about his self-assigned role as corporate reformer. Pablo Eisenberg, a senior fellow at Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy and longtime critic of foundations and corporations, wrote an open letter to Walker in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* last month taking him to task for accepting the appointment. “You failed to understand the negative impact your action could have on philanthropy, and on those working to change corporate behavior.”

In other words, Eisenberg is accusing him of selling out.

Eisenberg notes that in the eyes of activists like himself, Pepsi has been a bad actor in the corporate world for a long time. Not only have Pepsi executives opposed legislation to combat obesity (only small sodas, please)

but the company’s business model is designed to sell “junk food” and sugary drinks—even to poor people.

Walker, for his part, insists that he will not serve on Pepsi’s board as “window dressing” but will actually work to change the company’s policies. Pepsi’s CEO Indra Nooyi told the *New York Times* that she invited him to join her board because “we want people who



Darren Walker

give us trouble and ask tough questions. I saw in Darren someone who would hold us accountable.”

That may be true, but Pepsi no doubt prefers to hear its critics asking tough questions in the privacy of the boardroom rather than leading protests outside corporate headquarters or at public shareholder meetings. Adding Walker to its board is an easy and relatively cheap way for the company to signal to its critics that it is on the “right” side of controversial issues like climate change, public health, diversity, and inequality. (Walker apparently couldn’t do much to protect the company from the backlash it received over an ad in which Kendall Jenner seems to be cheapening the Black Lives Matter protests by offering a Pepsi to a police officer.)

In Pepsi’s defense, it is true that the company is selling more healthy products these days—a fair amount of

bottled water and items with less sugar and salt—but this is more because of changing tastes in the marketplace than in response to heavy-handed campaigns led by the likes of Michael Bloomberg and his own multi-billion-dollar foundation. Pepsi says it is planning to reduce its environmental impact in the next few years as a concession to critics concerned about climate change. No doubt the company will rely upon Walker to put the official stamp of progressive approval on whatever plans it eventually releases.

All of this mutual backscratching between leaders of liberal institutions and corporate America is nothing new. As Eisenberg noted in his letter, “Judith Rodin, who just retired as head of the Rockefeller Foundation, has been a member of at least three corporate boards, and some of [Walker’s] predecessors at Ford have also enjoyed the sizable perks that come with corporate directorships.” Hugh Price, who used to lead the Urban Institute, sits on the board of Verizon and MetLife. Anne-Marie Slaughter, the New America CEO, served on the boards of McDonald’s and Citigroup. Large corporations have long made it a practice to invite critics to join their boards on the assumption that it is always better (in Lyndon Johnson’s immortal words) “to have [them] inside the tent pissing out than outside pissing in.”

What is new in Eisenberg’s criticisms is that some progressives are starting to see that their erstwhile allies who join corporate boards are in effect providing cover for corporate practices they once criticized. Perhaps, they are suggesting, it is better for corporate critics to remain “outside the tent” where they can at least criticize corporate practices with a clear conscience.

In a recent interview on the Ford Foundation’s website, Martin Whittaker, CEO of JUST Capital, expressed worries about the dangers of “unchecked capitalism” and suggested that today’s market culture “strips capitalism of any humanity and incentivizes and rewards short-term financial gain at the expense of the broader social good”—not exactly a novel criticism. He went further to

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question whether Adam Smith would still support the free market if he could see how it operates today. His is actually one of the rosier views of capitalism that the Ford Foundation has promoted in recent years. It is a good question whether Walker's decision to join the Pepsi board is compatible with the anti-corporate and anti-capitalist views his foundation has staked out.

As Michael Siegel, a professor at Boston University's School of Public Health, told the *New York Times*, "Pepsi is not in the business of public health; they're in the business of selling soda." This is true, though beside the point. If Pepsi did not sell soda and other products not officially approved by progressive elites, the company would not be in business today to allow the likes of Walker to join its board.

For years, left-wing intellectuals have been pushing the idea of corporate social responsibility as a way to get companies to do the things they want, even if it costs the companies money. Whether it's reducing carbon emissions or making their workforces more diverse or changing the products they make, the goals these progressive gadflies are pursuing are no closer to being realized today than they were three or four decades ago when activists first learned they could shake down corporations for donations and occasional board positions in exchange for toning down their public criticisms. Much of the journalistic profession has by now signed on to the enterprise, calling on corporations to change their practices and to join one or another progressive crusade. This has at length evolved into a ritualized performance with all sides embracing "change" while recognizing that nothing fundamental has changed or is likely ever to change.

The cover story in the *Atlantic* this month about the small number of women employed by Silicon Valley concludes that the only way to achieve workforce diversity is to pay managers bonuses to hire more women. That's an expensive proposition and a fairly complicated one to carry out. It would be easier, some executives are bound to conclude, to deflect this kind of

criticism by appointing a few feminist leaders here and there to their corporate boards.

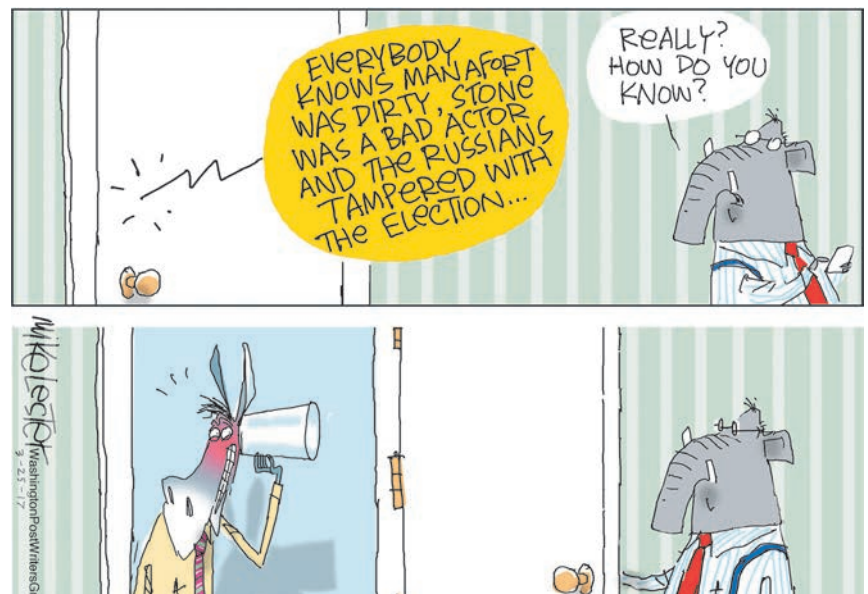
Progressives like Eisenberg and Walker are badly confused about the role large corporations can or should play in American society. On the one hand, by focusing so persistently on corporate reform, they express a tacit acceptance of the important role that large corporations play in the American economic system. They do not

**Corporate leaders can afford to pay lip service to progressive complaints but cannot do anything fundamental to satisfy them. And for this reason the ritual dance between the two sides will continue.**

wish to eliminate corporations or to cut them down to size, as an earlier generation of progressives wished, but to bend them in their political direction by inducing them to embrace diversity, feminism, environmentalism, gay marriage, and other causes—something that corporate leaders are more than willing to do, up to a point. At the same time, progressives want corporations to give up their market-oriented missions

by curtailing production of sodas, fossil fuels, guns, large automobiles, beer, cosmetics, furs, and any number of other items that run counter to the progressive vision of a pure and uncorrupted society. But this is something corporate leaders will not and cannot do without selling out their stockholders, employees, and customers. In short, they can afford to pay lip service to progressive complaints but cannot do anything fundamental to satisfy them. And for this reason the ritual dance between the two sides will continue.

But the corporate leaders are playing a perilous game and risk forgetting Kipling's adage that "once you have paid him the Danegeld, you never get rid of the Dane." They have made their alliance with progressives who are surely no friends of the American corporation, while antagonizing conservatives who should be their natural allies, but whose support they have long taken for granted. Those conservatives are aware that they win support today mainly from small business, blue-collar workers, and small town and rural voters—and have little direct interest in defending large corporations, whether in the areas of taxes, regulation, or trade. Corporate leaders at Pepsi and elsewhere may soon find themselves in a situation where they have no genuine allies to support them. ♦



# Sorry to Disappoint You, Mr. President

Don't expect automakers to open new factories.

BY RICHARD BURR



Ford F-150 pickups move through Michigan's Dearborn Truck Plant, September 2013.

**W**hen President Donald Trump visited Michigan in mid-March, he came to remind executives about his automotive field of dreams.

In an airport hangar in Ypsilanti where, during World War II, they used to make bombers, the president pushed leaders of foreign and domestic automakers to build new factories in America, not merely expand existing plants. Trump vowed that in exchange he would continue easing regulations such as for fuel economy and would fulfill his campaign promise to cut taxes.

It's the Trumpian version of "if you build it, he will come." But it is highly unlikely that automakers will be mowing down cornfields any time soon to construct new factories.

The problems are many. The highly cyclical auto industry last year

*Detroit*

set a U.S. sales record of 17.55 million vehicles. It was the seventh consecutive year of sales increases, a phenomenon not experienced since the modern industry was launched during the go-go 1920s.

"These cycles are fragile," said Michelle Krebs, a Detroit-based senior analyst for AutoTrader. Experts anticipate a slight decline in sales this year, but they were still taken aback when March sales were lower than expected.

There are other signs of a softening market. Foreign and U.S. automakers spent an estimated \$3,511 per vehicle on sales "incentives" in March, a 13.4 percent increase from a year ago, according to ALG, a Santa Monica, California-based car valuation firm. General Motors has reduced shifts at three Michigan plants, meaning layoffs for most of the 3,200 affected employees, except those who land jobs at other facilities.

"Inventories have been rising over the past year, and so have incentives," Krebs said. "I think what you will

see is more cutbacks in production."

The last thing auto executives facing cutbacks want to do is spend \$1 billion or more to build what Trump called "modern plants like you're building in Mexico."

Seared into the minds of domestic auto leaders are the closings of 57 GM, Ford, and Chrysler assembly, stamping, and other plants from 2005 to 2012, including 2 from the GM-Toyota venture in California. The shutdowns resulted in the loss of nearly 161,000 jobs, according to the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan. GM and Chrysler went through bankruptcy reorganizations as part of the Obama administration bailouts, and Italy's Fiat bought Chrysler.

The "Detroit Three" automakers haven't built any U.S. assembly plants in a decade and there are no plans to construct any. The Detroit automakers have been expanding at existing factories. Ford plans to invest almost \$2 billion in existing Michigan facilities in the next few years. The investments are expected to retain or add more than 4,000 jobs, many of them negotiated in the 2015 United Auto Workers contract.

"You build a plant . . . for the next 40 to 50 years, you need to keep feeding it capital," Kristin Dzikczek of the Center for Automotive Research told the *Detroit News*. "We're fulfilling peak market demand with what we've got, and it's not a smart decision to go beyond that unless there's bigger market demand coming that no one sees."

The irony is that Trump's made-in-America factory vision may be partially fulfilled by foreign automakers. Chinese-owned Volvo Cars Ltd. is constructing a factory in South Carolina. Its sales increased 18 percent in 2016. South Korean automakers Hyundai Motor and Kia Motors say they are considering building new U.S. factories.

Still, the president is going to want a beautiful Detroit Three factory or two built as monuments to his vision. It was a big reason Trump threatened to slap a tariff as high as 35 percent on the cars and trucks

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they import from Mexico. No tariff exists now because of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Trump's best bet for getting new domestic plants is to increase economic growth. And the top option for that is to pass meaningful tax reform. Trump wants to cut corporate and income tax rates. But the complexities of tax reform, coupled with the Republicans' inability to repeal and replace Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, are threatening prospects for tax cut legislation this year.

Tax reform could help auto sales depending on how much it helps consumers. Krebs estimates that the United States could sell up to 20 million vehicles a year, or about 2.5 million more than are currently sold, because the adult population has grown by some 38 million since 2000, when the last big auto sales record—17.35 million cars and trucks—was set.

The problem is affordability, Krebs said. Prices of cars and trucks have risen, while the incomes and wages of middle-class and low-income Americans have stagnated. Sales of luxury and large vehicles have soared during the recovery because upper-income families haven't had trouble buying. But sales in the modest segments of sedans and smaller vehicles have languished. So it is important that any tax reform help middle-class and low-income earners, who typically purchase a smaller new car, often as first-time buyers.

There are limits to what Trump can achieve by jawboning. During the Ypsilanti roundtable, the president turned to Jim Lentz, chief executive of Toyota North America, and insisted, "You have to build plants here. I know I gave you a hard time, but you have to build them here."

"I understand," responded Lentz, whose firm says it didn't lay off a single American worker during the recession and has since hired 8,000 U.S. employees. "I understand."

But after the president left, Lentz said, "If you take today as a starting point, that may not be fair to all companies." ♦

# We Have Ways to Make You Conform

The Human Rights Campaign's sham rankings.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

**T**he grievance-industry racket is as old as the culture war itself. But rarely has it been practiced as transparently as it was this past week by the Human Rights Campaign.

You may recall the Human Rights Campaign from its two-decade drive to legalize same-sex marriage, which HRC cleverly packaged as an apolitical, universal "human right." Having won their victory through the majesty of Anthony Kennedy's pen, however, the folks at HRC decided not to press on for same-sex marriage in, say, Saudi Arabia and China, but rather to throw themselves fully into shakedown mode here at home, where they make busy with corporate outreach (companies pay them to achieve bronze, silver, gold, or platinum "partnerships") and fundraising (you can get a specialty HRC Visa card to automate donations) and bullying the occasional doctor or scientist who will not parrot the current orthodoxy on human sexuality.

Last fall, for instance, Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh published a report on sexuality and gender in the *New Atlantis*, a journal on technology and society. Mayer is an epidemiologist trained in psychiatry who is a resident scholar at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Paul McHugh is a professor of psychiatry at Hopkins. Their report, a review of the scientific literature on the nature of sexual orientation, sexuality, and gender identity, was a detailed yet accessible document written for a general audience. (We covered it in these pages at the time, "Studying the Unstudiable," September 12, 2016.)

*Jonathan V. Last is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

Right from the start, the Human Rights Campaign was unhappy with the report. The HRC began warning Johns Hopkins that it would take action against the institution if it did not take significant steps to distance the medical school from McHugh and Mayer's report. The big threat: If Hopkins didn't punish Mayer and McHugh, the school's intransigence would hurt its rankings in HRC's next Healthcare Equality Index (HEI).

In 2007, the HRC began compiling an annual index of LGBTQ equality and patient care for health care institutions. Inclusion in the index was purely voluntary. The HRC invited clinics and hospitals to submit themselves for review. Participation, they unobtrusively advised, would "Reduce risk of litigation, complaints, and negative publicity."

Despite any resemblances to a protection scheme, the HEI was presented as a super-duper scientific exercise. There were detailed criteria in five categories: patient nondiscrimination, visitation, decision-making, cultural competency training for staff, and employment policies. In the first year of the report, 30 institutions (representing 78 hospitals) elected to participate. In return, the Human Rights Campaign kept all of the results confidential.

The next year, the HRC used the same criteria, but made the results public. Happily enough, all of the hospitals who submitted to the examination were given a participation trophy. The HRC offered no rankings or demerits—just a long list of checked boxes and kind words.

Johns Hopkins participated that year and did just fine. In the 2009

survey, more hospitals volunteered to participate and, having reached a critical mass, the HRC shifted gears again and established a hierarchy, with a list of 10 top performer hospitals that represented the gold standard for LGBTQ equality.

With each passing year more hospitals threw themselves on the mercy of the Human Rights Campaign. It's hard to understand why. Maybe hospital administrators were getting woke. Maybe they were subject to pressure from their peers. Maybe they understood that as more institutions placed themselves under the protective umbrella of the Human Rights Campaign, the more the stragglers would stand out.

Whatever the case, the 2010 report represented the first change in methodology for the index, with the HRC doing away with the "decision-making" category and including a heavy emphasis on gender identity. Lots and lots of the participating institutions failed this new trans test, but they all failed together, and HRC used the carrot and not the stick. Whatever else you want to say about the Human Rights Campaign, they understand bureaucracies the way Tolstoy understood people. The following year the list of "top performers" more than doubled, as institutions tried to get right by the new transgender agenda.

As the number of participating hospitals swelled, so did the ranks of the "top performer" list. In 2012, Johns Hopkins, along with 70 other respondents, got a gold star from the HRC and became an "Equality Leader." Hopkins retained this status through 2016, though by that point it had become somewhat devalued. Of the 568 institutions participating last year, the HRC designated 496 of them "Equality Leaders."

All of which left the Human Rights Campaign with a problem when it came to the Mayer-McHugh report. The group had threatened to punish Hopkins if the medical school didn't take action against Mayer and

McHugh. But Hopkins was already an Equality Leader, and the institution hadn't changed any of its policies in the areas that the HRC measured. Punishing Hopkins would reveal that the essence of the Healthcare Equality Index was mau-mauing, not Science.

So this year the HRC decided to radically revamp its methodology. The new index awards 40 points for patient nondiscrimination and staff training; 30 points for patient services and support; 20 points for employee benefits and policies; and 10 points for patient and community engagement. Giving hospitals a possible total of 100 points.



Oh, and there was one other tweak: The HRC introduced a new category called "Responsible Citizenship." Institutions could not *earn* any points for being responsible citizens. But they could be docked 25 points if the Human Rights Campaign decided that they had *not* been responsible citizens.

Of the 590 institutions in the 2017 index, you'll never guess which was the *only one* to be deemed an "irresponsible citizen." I'll give you a hint: It rhymes with Bonds Bopkins.

To be sure the people at Hopkins got the message, the HRC even included this helpful explanatory paragraph:

The point deduction may be reflected in a current or future score, depending on the situation. If applied to a current score, HEI Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality status

will be suspended or revoked as necessary. If at any time after losing points on this criterion, a healthcare facility changes course and satisfies the HRC Foundation's noted concerns, HRC Foundation will re-evaluate the criterion for that facility.

It would be outrageous if it weren't so pathetic.

For seven months now, gay activists—from HRC, to college sociology professors, to journalists—have attacked the Mayer-McHugh report without laying a glove on it. The reason the report has been substantively bulletproof is immediately clear to anyone who bothers to read it: It's an extremely cautious document that relies entirely on published research and presents both sides of all arguments. If you had to boil Mayer and McHugh's conclusions down to a single sentence, it would go something like this: *Human sexuality and gender are incredibly complicated, a lot of what's presented as "fact" has no sturdy basis in scientific research, and we really ought to study the entire subject more rigorously.*

But even this careful, empirical view is regarded as a blasphemy against LGBTQ orthodoxy.

That orthodoxy has shifted over time, sometimes insisting sexual orientation is a lifestyle choice, sometimes a spot on a sliding scale, sometimes a hardwired genetic fact—whatever is most politically expedient at the time. The Mayer-McHugh report makes it plain that all of these claims have been scientifically hollow. The truth may be one of them, or some of them, or all of them—or something else altogether. We don't know, and the people who have spent the last 20 years insisting that we do know have been peddling a political agenda, not science.

The reaction to the Mayer-McHugh report reveals that the HRC is not an honest broker. It is concerned not with morality, nor responsibility, nor science. The Human Rights Campaign is devoted to one thing, and one thing only: power. ♦

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# A Trump in a China Shop?

*America's astonishing antifragility*

BY ANDY SMARICK

In hindsight, much of the coverage of Donald Trump's candidacy could have run under the same headline: "Unexpected bull poised to enter china shop." But commentators spent virtually all of their energy expounding on the first half of that metaphor. Our campaign ethologists incessantly analyzed the behavior of this curious new political animal. What conditions created the bull, who's feeding it, why is it acting this way?



*Washington attorney general Bob Ferguson smiles after a federal appeals court refused to reinstate President Trump's ban on travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries, February 9.*

This isn't totally surprising. Such analysis of presidential contenders is the grist of campaign mills. What was unusual is how matter-of-factly the analysts cast America's institutions as a china shop.

We were continuously advised of the porcelain-level delicacy of our system of government. Were Trump to burst in, he'd raze the building and pulverize its contents. Dire warnings were issued by progressive columnists like Jonathan Chait ("extraordinary threat to American democracy") and Paul Krugman ("a corrupt

nation ruled by strongmen") and conservatives like Michael Gerson ("genuine threat to the American form of self-government"). The *Washington Post* editorial board called Trump, on different occasions, "a unique threat to American democracy," "a danger to the republic," and the "candidate of the apocalypse."

Since his inauguration, President Trump has, admittedly, offered such critics little solace. The substance and rollout of his first executive order on immigration flouted a range of governing norms. His attacks on federal courts, the intelligence community, and the media ("the enemy of the people") attempted to undermine legitimate checks on his authority. His dubious claim of millions of illegal votes eroded confidence in our electoral system. His accusation that President Obama spied on him tarnished the office; his press secretary's claim that the British had done the same made matters worse. His first national security adviser's shadowy extracurricular activities added to concerns about Russian canoodling.

In just a few short weeks on the job, *Taurus Rex* gave the impression that he was intentionally challenging core elements of our governing infrastructure—separation of powers, due process, an independent press, fair elections. In a March article in the *Atlantic* titled "How to Build an Autocracy," David Frum, a former aide to president George W. Bush, put these puzzle pieces together and argued, "We are living through the most dangerous challenge to the free government of the United States that anyone alive has encountered."

Though understandably alarmed, observers could still hold out hope that this was no premeditated assault. Maybe this was just a brash political outsider doing what brash political outsiders do: jostling the system. Bulls aren't calculating; they're all instinct and muscle. They can be corralled.

But then came the smoking gun. A February *Politico Magazine* article seemed to reveal that there was, in fact, a method to the madness. The similarity of these disquieting episodes wasn't mere coincidence. Perhaps we were seeing an intentional effort to upend our system.

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ELAINE THOMPSON / AP

The article compiled—and editorialized about—some of the favorite books of Trump’s top strategist, Steve Bannon. The books listed “help to explain the commotion” of the early Trump administration. We were told that one book, *The Fourth Turning*, informed Bannon’s view that America is in a period “of cataclysmic change in which the old order is destroyed and replaced.” In total, the books purportedly reflected Bannon’s view that Western civilization is “on a downward trajectory and that only a shock to the system can reverse its decline.”

Highlighted on this menacing list was Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s 2012 bestseller *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, which according to *Politico* “reads like a user’s guide to the Trump insurgency.” It was described as a “broadside against big government” that advocates the takedown of arrogant elites who’ve been in charge. A year ago on Facebook, Taleb wrote, “People are not voting for Trump (or Sanders). People are just voting, finally, to destroy the establishment.”

To those already anxious about Trump’s treatment of our institutions, the article amounted to conducting a five-espreso gavage on someone already in the grips of a panic attack. Here, it seemed, was proof that the administration’s behavior was driven by a purposeful, pernicious strategy. The bull isn’t just brawn, vim, and intuition. It is studied and shrewd. It knows exactly what it’s doing.

But a closer reading of the article is the best sedative. Interviewed for the piece, Taleb never mentioned undermining, much less destroying, American institutions (he doesn’t identify himself as a Trump supporter). More important, anyone who’s read *Antifragile* knows it’s not a how-to playbook on rebellion. It’s an insightful, serious study of how things develop the ability to withstand and grow stronger from shocks. In fact, the term “antifragile” describes organizations, institutions, and systems that *don’t* crumble under pressure but instead absorb impacts, adapt to changing conditions, and constantly improve in reaction to acute stress.

And this—America’s astonishing antifragility—would seem to be the real story of our nation’s response to the Trump administration so far. The president may be a bull, but American institutions are proving to be anything but a china shop. They are not only surviving every threat thrown their way, they may be growing stronger thanks to the tests.

## IMMUNE RESPONSE

Much of America’s intelligentsia has been in an acute state of hypochondria since Trump’s election. With each passing day they discover new reasons for hand-wringing over the prospects of the union. But the American body politic is preternaturally robust. The Constitution is chock-full of devices protecting the nation from internal threats. Our Founders weren’t dreamy-utopian types; they knew human history and human nature. They planned for this. They knew men weren’t angels, and that angels would not govern men.

So federal powers were separated, checked, and balanced. Federalism and individual rights further diluted state authority. Not coincidentally, Americans embraced the concept of subsidiarity and developed an energetic

civil society—both tools for acting together locally and voluntarily—since we didn’t want to be acted upon from far away. America broke apart the scepter and distributed its pieces far and wide. Call it the “Madison-Tocqueville defense,” a prophylactic against autocracy.

And so while commentators galore have been sounding the alarm in response to President Trump’s ostensible offensive against our institutions, a torrent of white blood cells have been rushing to the site of every single attack. Whether you’re enjoying the new administration’s activities or absolutely apoplectic, we

should collectively be awed by the immune response.

To protest Trump’s positions on a range of issues, the Women’s March gathered millions across dozens of locations. After his travel-ban executive order, lawyers descended on airports to offer pro-bono help to affected individuals, the ACLU reported record-setting donations, and “sanctuary city” mayors remained defiant. After Kellyanne Conway plugged Ivanka Trump’s clothing line, Congress and the Office of Government Ethics publicly advocated discipline. After revelations of unseemly engagements with Russian leaders, Trump’s national security adviser was hounded from office and his attorney general recused himself from future investigations. When Trump disparaged the judiciary, his own Supreme Court nominee lamented attacks on the courts.

This extensive and ever-growing list teaches us that America possesses a copious capacity to respond to the state’s transgressions. Whatever the action, there’s been

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an equal and opposite reaction. Our system has already shown itself to be amazingly resilient. And like a secure city-state protected by high, durable walls, it's those on the attack who are getting worn down. White House leaks are unremitting. The president fulminated at his senior staff over the attorney general's recusal and then decamped for Florida without them. White House staff members are reportedly working in a "culture of paranoia" because of the toxic internal environment.

But when we assess the strength of institutions, *Antifragile* tells us to look "beyond resilience or robustness." It's not merely what a body can take or what it can dish out; antifragility is also about "post-traumatic growth." "Some things benefit from shocks," Taleb writes. "They thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors."

### INVERSE IATROGENESIS

Conservatives are well aware of the unintended negative consequences of government action. It's the political version of the medical concept of iatrogenesis—illness caused by medical treatment. But Taleb lauds antifragile institutions that demonstrate an "inverse-iatrogenic" effect, those that somehow get sturdier and smarter when assailed. In the weeks since the inauguration, we've seen signs of this across the board. For instance, concerns that civic opposition to the administration would wither from fear already seem laughable. To the contrary, the will to defy has only strengthened. In the early days of the new administration, the acting attorney general's refusal to defend the administration's travel ban made her a hero to the opposition; late-night comics have been relentless; the liberal think tank Center for American Progress rebranded itself as the "central hub of the Trump resistance."

Obviously, it will take more than a few months to know for sure whether our major American institutions have been meaningfully and lastingly toughened by the Trump phenomenon. But the early signs are that two of the most important institutions—the media and Congress—may be headed in that direction.

For eons, the media have been criticized (often with good reason) for political bias. But frustration grew in recent years as "reporting" expanded to include editorial-style analysis and tendentious "fact-checking," which was often indistinguishable from editorializing. Criticism peaked as the press, for a year, utterly failed to grasp Trump's appeal to tens of millions of voters. The appraisal was damning and mostly deserved: The media are partial and out-of-touch, and their obsession with tweets and clicks have made them excitable and unserious.

Trump's subsequent fake-news and enemy-of-the-people attacks might've been a body blow to a profession that

looked like a shadow of its former self. Indeed, in December, a prominent journalism professor predicted that "winter is coming" for the American press, and in January the *Atlantic* ran an article, "What Trump Could Mean for Journalism," that chronicled how populist strongmen in Venezuela, Turkey, Russia, and elsewhere had successfully muzzled the press.

Such alarms now look astonishingly overwrought. Instead, Trump's ascendance has led to at least a measure of self-reflection. The *New York Times* public editor has questioned the paper's use of unnamed sources and the evolution of its editing process. A columnist for the *Washington Post* argued that the press must "return to the fundamentals" of reporting, "put our heads down and do our jobs," and "triple-source." He ended with a remarkably antifragile sentiment. Trump "represents a fundamental challenge to journalism in the 21st century. That's not a bad thing."

More important, there have been some nontrivial changes since the election. The editor in chief of Reuters penned a principled, level-headed message to his staff about how to cover Trump, which included "recommitting ourselves to reporting fairly and honestly." A number of reporters have acknowledged bubble-induced blind spots. The leadership of the *Times* felt compelled to publish a nonapology-apology about its misunderstanding of Trump's appeal and a promise to rededicate itself to "report America and the world honestly." CNN, wanting to be an organization that does more than just "[talk] about breaking news," hired two Pulitzer Prize winners. The *Washington Post* is adding 60 journalists to its newsroom.

There might be even more light on the horizon. *Politico*'s senior media writer believes the Trump era could make the press great again, calling the moment a "journalistic spring," a chance for a revival. The *Times* executive editor agrees, recently telling an audience, "The next two years will be a historic moment in the life of news organizations." The point is simple: Apprehension about the media's future may be overblown; it could be stronger post-Trump.

And we may be witnessing an even more antifragile response from the First Branch. In recent years, Congress has too often taken a back seat to the executive branch—it's done too little to stop the unfettered growth of the administrative state and has too often been complicit in that growth, preferring to eschew responsibility and blame faceless bureaucrats for unpopular regulations. It's been unable, or unwilling, to get a handle on the federal budget process. Trump's alpha-dog aggression could have caused a discombobulated, skittish legislative branch to perpetually expose its belly. And that would have immediate and long-term institutional consequences.

But Congress seems instead to be steeling itself. Its

opposition party is in full resistance mode, from party-line “no” votes on multiple confirmations to Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s nevertheless-she-persisted moment. Congressional Republicans are also sticking their necks out, at least occasionally. Senator Marco Rubio, frustrated by the administration’s posture toward Russia, publicly scrutinized the nomination of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and criticized the president for equating Vladimir Putin’s misdeeds to our own; senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski voted against a cabinet nominee.

Some of this may be the usual grandstanding for which Capitol Hill is famous. But that only underscores the point: If the apocalypse were upon us, you would no longer see lawmakers engaging in their normal behaviors. And beyond the actions by individual members are the notable institutional responses to current events. The intelligence committees are examining deeply Trump’s specious wiretap allegations and endeavoring to shed light on any untoward ties to Russia. Congressional leaders and budget committee members are pushing back against elements of the administration’s spending proposal. House speaker Paul Ryan and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell—not administration officials—tried to direct the Obamacare repeal effort, and their work was toppled by animated, empowered members who were uncowed by the president’s threats to exact a political price for their lack of cooperation. And all of this is taking place in the broader context of Congress’s nascent attempts in recent years to reassert itself.

For a year, Sen. Mike Lee has been pushing what he calls the “Article One Project” to re-empower Congress vis-à-vis the other branches. Congress has reanimated the dormant Congressional Review Act, through which it can overturn a wide array of agency regulations, thereby checking the administrative state. A bit more than a year ago Congress passed the sweeping, bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act to call a halt to the executive branch’s meddling in schools. Earlier this year, the House

expanded its oversight ability, empowering committee staff to subpoena and depose government officials.

Congress’s self-assertion is starting to mirror the institution’s prior demonstrations of antifragility. The legislature has historically gotten stronger after tussling with audacious presidents. It censured “King Andrew” in 1834; it responded to the Johnson-Nixon era with the War Powers Act and impeachment proceedings; it defeated FDR’s court-packing scheme and then limited presidents to two terms. A china shop this ain’t.

Of course there can be problems with overactive immune systems. The media, for instance, have shown a propensity to interpret even benign Trumpian activities as provocations deserving retaliation. And even healthy immune systems can exhaust themselves, degrading the capacity to respond to real threats or forcing us to suffer the political equivalent of chronic pain—merely enduring through gritted teeth instead of growing stronger. But with nearly 100 days under our belts, the early indications tell us that had anyone actually intended to fundamentally undermine our institutions, it was a fool’s errand.

In fact, the resilience of our system has been so pronounced that it’s not completely unreasonable to wonder if the administration has taken onboard the true lessons of *Antifragile*. That is, perhaps the president and his team are so at ease dispensing with traditions, altering international relationships, flouting political niceties, and so on because they believe this is their only hope for effecting the dramatic policy changes they believe are necessary *and* because they understand that our institutions are more than capable of handling the ensuing tumult.

Even if that interpretation is too generous, the turbulent early days of this administration plus the astounding antifragility demonstrated by our institutions offer something encouraging for the president’s supporters and detractors alike: If his approach to governing proves sound, he will have made American policy great again. But if his approach is indeed a threat, he may still help to make America’s institutions greater than ever before. ♦

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*North Carolina Republican Mark Meadows, chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, enjoys the attentions of the media, March 23.*



Seiji Ozawa conducts the Berlioz Requiem (2001).

# Symphonic Range

*A reader's guide to the classical wall of sound.* BY GEORGE B. STAUFFER

**A**s dean of an arts school, I'm often asked where the arts stand at a time when so much attention has been focused on the value of the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Not too long ago, in a full-page ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Santa Clara University, a Jesuit institution in Silicon Valley, proudly announced the receipt of a \$100 million gift to construct a state-of-the-art facility for STEM education, which it termed “transformational.” One cannot question the benefits of STEM studies,

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**Language of the Spirit**  
*An Introduction to Classical Music*  
 by Jan Swafford  
 Basic Books, 336 pp., \$28

of course: Since the Enlightenment, they have systematically bettered the material lot of mankind. But are they truly “transformational”? Do they truly touch the soul?

When making the case for the arts, the question I pose to audiences is this: When folks reach retirement age, ponder the future, and begin to sense their mortality, how many of them turn to the STEM disciplines? How many sign up for a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics refresher course? Not a

lot, I wager. But how many turn to the arts, and take up an instrument, join a chorus, buy a dance or theater subscription, or set up an easel and begin to paint—like George W. Bush, whose new volume *Portraits of Courage* features his own recently completed canvases? In the end, most people long for something more than the practical comforts provided by the STEM fields. They seek solace, and insight into the meaning of life. When time counts, the arts matter.

And there's another bonus. In the case of music, no other activity utilizes more parts of the brain. As Oliver Sacks and Daniel Levitin have shown, music, with its demands on motor reflex, memory, cognition, emotion, and anticipation, stirs the synapses like nothing else. Music gives the

HIROYUKI ITO / GETTY IMAGES

cranial tissue a thorough workout—a phenomenon sometimes called “the Mozart effect.”

For those in search of both personal fulfillment and mental exercise, Jan Swafford’s new introduction to classical music is just the thing. A compact, reader-friendly volume, it traverses the repertoire from the Middle Ages to “Modernism and Beyond” in 36 short chapters, surveying 27 composers and providing general descriptions of the main stylistic periods. The composers covered include the usual suspects—Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wagner, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartók—as well as some more-parochial specialists, such as Ives, Britten, and Ligeti. Swafford skirts opera composers other than Richard Wagner, claiming they would require another book, and Mendelssohn is oddly absent. Otherwise, everyone is here who should be here. (Well, sort of—more on that later).

Swafford is a witty and impassioned guide to the great composers and the great masterpieces. A composer, critic, and respected biographer of Johannes Brahms, Swafford taught classical music at the New England Conservatory for many years. He has mastered the composers, their biographies, and their compositions. Equally important for an introductory audience, he is intimately familiar with the rich layer of anecdotes that envelops the lives of the composers and enlivens every effective music history course.

Lawrence Kramer’s *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (see “Requiem for Strings,” *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*, July 30, 2007) was a somber defense of classical music and its relevance in today’s society. Swafford’s work, by contrast, is an upbeat, uninhibited romp through the repertoire. Geared to a broad readership without specialized knowledge, it contains no music excerpts or accompanying CDs. Instead, Swafford points to favorite renditions that can be heard on the web, through YouTube and other free sources. The text resembles the narration on a London tour bus, with Swafford as the articulate, chatty guide:

Wagner not only survived but thrived in this atmosphere [of controversy]. He prospered partly because he was a tougher and meaner son of a bitch than any of his critics.

So there you have it.

The chapter on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is characteristic of Swafford’s approach. After extracting the man from myth—Mozart was buried like most Viennese of the time, not in the pauper’s grave of legend—Swafford sketches his life, from coddled prodigy on tour to resentful provider of church music in Salzburg to celebrated composer of piano concertos and operas in Vienna. Swafford brings Mozart to life, describing his personal hobbies (air-rifle competitions and bowling games in Salzburg; horseback riding and billiards in Vienna), lusty letters to his wife Constanze, and lavish parties. But he also gives concise, insightful descriptions of key examples of Mozart’s writing: the Piano Concerto in C Major (K. 467) and D Minor (K. 466), the “Dissonant” String Quartet in C Major (K. 465), and the Symphony No. 38 in D Major (“Prague”).

Like many writers, Swafford places Mozart at the top of opera composers, with a unique ability to capture the psychological state of characters of all social levels, high, middle, and low. Here he is on *The Magic Flute*:

*The Magic Flute* is a transparent allegory of Freemasonry, that international collection of lodges that were a kind of underground progressive force during the Enlightenment. I think, though, that the deeper subject of this opera is Mozart’s favorite subject, love: the earthy love of Papageno and Papagena, the exalted love of Tamino and Pamina, the divine love of Sarastro for all humanity. At the end, with the betrothal of Tamino and Pamina, Sarastro hails the couple and the victory of light over darkness. For Mozart, love was that light, the highest wisdom we know.

That Mozart could compose such sublime music seemingly without effort is one of the great miracles of Western music. And here I am reminded of a chestnut not related by Swafford: In the original manuscript

of the piano Prelude and Fugue in C Major, (K. 383a), the fugue appears first, followed by the prelude. As Mozart explained in a letter to his sister Nannerl, to whom he sent the piece, the prelude ought to come first and the fugue afterward, of course; but since fugues are more difficult to compose than preludes, he first worked out the fugue in his head and then wrote it down while thinking out the prelude.

In reading Swafford’s survey, one is impressed once again by the dominating force of Ludwig van Beethoven. Johann Sebastian Bach may be viewed as the number-one composer today (according to a 2011 *New York Times* survey) but it was Beethoven who made life challenging for all who followed. Where could other composers go after Beethoven’s symphonies, piano sonatas, and string quartets, each one innovative and perfect in its own way? Franz Schubert started many symphonies—the “Unfinished” is just one—without being able to bring them to completion; Brahms, Robert Schumann, and Frédéric Chopin retreated to noncompetitive piano miniatures and chamber pieces. Franz Liszt tossed out the traditional symphony altogether and turned instead to the orchestral poem. And Gustav Mahler tried to out-Beethoven Beethoven with his gigantic symphonies that attempted to embrace the cosmos. For composers seeking a new voice, it was tough going after Beethoven.

It was Beethoven, too, who first estranged audiences by writing pieces they couldn’t understand. The “Eroica” Symphony, unveiled in 1805, was the first musical work known to incur hostility: Its jarring dissonances, harmonic meanderings, and unprecedented length bewildered listeners accustomed to hearing the pleasant tones of Mozart and Franz Joseph Haydn. From Beethoven onward, the gap between composers and audiences inexorably widened, as music progressives expanded the range of dissonance, trying ever-more-adventurous harmonic schemes. The chief signposts along the road to controversy were Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), likened by the Viennese critic Eduard

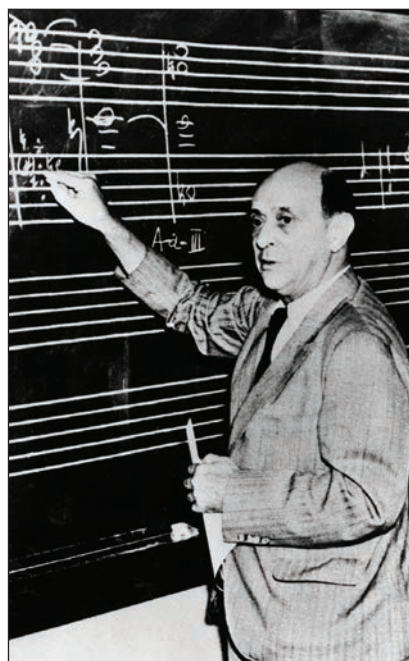
Hanslick to “the old Italian painting of a martyr whose intestines are slowly unwound from his body on a reel,” Arnold Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra* (1909), described as “feeding time at the zoo” by the *Daily Telegraph*, and finally, Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, which famously caused a riot at its Paris premiere in 1913. The journey from the *Eroica* to atonality was marked by detours (Brahms, Antonin Dvorak) and dead ends (Charles Ives, Anton Webern). But it was not until very recently that classical music finally took a sharp U-turn, with the return to romantic sonorities of postmodernist composers.

Playing on this theme, Swafford stirs up interest by stressing the heated rivalries that developed from opposing camps of composers. In the 19th century, it was the archconservative Brahms, who went so far as to use the *chaconne* form of the Baroque in his Fourth Symphony, versus the irascible radical Wagner, who pushed traditional tonality to the edge with the unresolved cadences of *Tristan und Isolde*. Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and Mahler lined up behind Brahms, while Ives, Claude Debussy, and Richard Strauss carried forth Wagner’s iconoclastic approach.

In the 20th century, it was Stravinsky (who, like Picasso, went through numerous artistic stages) versus Schoenberg, who took Wagner’s work to its endgame by developing the 12-tone system that treated all pitches equally, producing atonality. (“I write what I feel in my heart,” Schoenberg stated—to which an English critic responded that one could only assume that he was “suffering from some unclassifiable and peculiarly virulent form of cardiac disease.”) Debussy, Darius Milhaud, and Dmitri Shostakovich adopted aspects of Stravinsky’s style, while Webern and Alban Berg followed Schoenberg, establishing the Second Viennese School (the first being Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven).

As a composer, Swafford exhibits a special fondness for modern music, and his discussion of 20th-century American figures is especially compelling. He compares the astonishingly wide spectrum of sounds in

Ives’s music, for instance, to the “prodigal diversity” of America. Indeed, Ives’s wild mix of marching band sounds, American hymns, college songs, quotations from European classical composers, fiddle tunes, and more reflects the melting pot of the nation itself. Many of Ives’s compositions had to wait decades for public performance, but they’ve now taken hold, thanks to champions such as Leonard Bernstein, who revived the symphonies and other large orchestral works.



Arnold Schoenberg (1951)

“The fabric of existence weaves itself whole,” Swafford quotes Ives as saying. “You cannot set art off in a corner and hope for it to have vitality, reality, and substance.”

Aaron Copland, although trained in France, also developed a uniquely American idiom. A protégé of the French teacher Nadia Boulanger, Copland sought to solve the disintegrating relations between the music-loving public and active composers by writing music that mirrored America: vibrant, jazzy, folksy, appealing. His three great ballet scores—*Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*—written between 1938 and 1944 revolutionized the big orchestra sound. The famous “Hoe-down” from *Rodeo* has the potential

to be a cliché, Swafford points out, but its brilliant orchestration, drawn from Stravinsky and Mahler, and its ecstatic fiddle tune take the day. It’s difficult to say precisely what makes Copland’s music sound so American: perhaps the rugged harmonies and reliance on open fifths, which somehow seem to reflect the open prairies. Copland was also interested in general music education and wrote a bestselling introductory text, *What to Listen for in Music*. Swafford’s volume follows this tradition.

(Also mentioned in a “Further Modernist Listening” section are George Gershwin and Samuel Barber. With his *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F*, Gershwin attempted to merge classical music and jazz, a step also taken in his American update of Chopin, *Three Preludes* for piano. And Swafford makes a good case for Barber, whose beautiful Adagio for Strings has become a “ubiquitous accompaniment for tragedies depicted in the media.”)

Although Swafford’s writing on modern music is strong, his account drops off in the 1970s and ’80s without exploring the recent rebellion against the harsh dissonances of the 12-tone system. He stops with the minimalist music of Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and John Adams, whose repetition of small melodic fragments creates a hypnotic effect and vague sense of unity. Adams’s *Nixon in China*, which premiered in 1987, is about as late as Swafford goes. There is no mention of postmodernist music—scores that have successfully returned to the plush consonant sounds of romanticism. The important works of Arvo Pärt, Julia Wolfe, Richard Danielpour, and Tan Dun, for example, are not discussed, nor is the mystical music of Kaija Saariaho, whose *L’Amour de loin* just received a stunning production at the Metropolitan Opera. The last 20 years have been a happy period for audiences, for composers have written music they can actually enjoy.

In “Conclusions,” Swafford discusses the early-music movement that began in the 1970s and has grown to prominence in modern performance. The re-creation of the instruments,

INTERFOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

orchestras, and choirs of the 17th and 18th centuries, in particular, has opened the ears of audiences to new-old sounds. By the 1990s, the early-music movement had more or less reclaimed the Baroque repertory and was moving into music of the classical and romantic periods as well. Wood-framed pianos offered softer but richer performances of Chopin waltzes, and valveless horns thinner but more nuanced renditions of Brahms symphonies. We thought we knew the music of these composers thoroughly, but the early-music movement has revealed yet another side to 18th- and 19th-century masters that has further piqued interest.

Since 2000, however, it has become increasingly clear that early music, world music, and popular music are merging with classical music. The great eclectic gathering of diverse sounds envisioned a hundred years ago by Charles Ives has come to pass. From my own teaching of introductory music classes, I can report that today's students still listen to classical music—but they don't single it out as anything special or elite. Armed with laptops, tablets, smartphones, and iPods, and assisted by iTunes, Pandora, Spotify, and other online resources, they consume vast amounts of music on a daily basis. And they have astonishingly cosmopolitan palates, happily taking in reggae, heavy metal, gamelan, hip hop, grunge, salsa, jazz, classical, klezmer—and much more, in equal measure. It's all one playlist, it's all music, and it's all "classic."

*Language of the Spirit*, with its limited focus on the traditional classical canon and its omission of women, non-Western, and popular composers, inadvertently comes across as a kind of pitch to "make classical music great again." The narrative is written with polish and finesse, and it conveys great conviction and enthusiasm. But it's at odds with the day-to-day experience of today's millennials, for whom fusion and global tastes are the norm. I don't know where we're going as a nation, but from what I see in the classroom, that's where we're headed in music and the arts. ♦

BCA

# Shooting Blanks

*Listen for the big guns of the Democratic artillery.*

BY ROGER KIMBALL

In an 1852 letter, Gustave Flaubert announced his ambition to write "a book about nothing, a book with no external attachments." He added: "The most beautiful books are those with the least matter."

Flaubert managed to assault bourgeois sensibilities with such scandalous, if exquisitely wrought, works as *Madame Bovary*. But he never quite succeeded in writing a book about nothing. That achievement had to wait until the 21st century for fulfillment. The judges are still out, but I suspect that the palm for that award might well go to Michael J. Knowles, a recent graduate in history from Yale, for the incisive political analysis in *Reasons to Vote for Democrats*.

There is a reason that this brief, but comprehensive, inquiry shot to the number-one spot on Amazon. First, it covers all the bases: There are chapters on Economics, Foreign Policy, Civil Rights, Education, Homeland Security, Energy, Jobs, Crime, Immigration, and (perhaps the weightiest section) Values. Knowles has covered the waterfront. Second, as his extensive bibliography suggests, Knowles has done his homework: He has drawn on a wide and bipartisan range of works, from Saul Alinsky's classic handbook for community organizers, *Rules for Radicals*, to Peter Schweizer's critical investigation into the Clintons' finances in *Clinton Cash*—and many other books.

The conservative pundit Ben Shapiro summed up Knowles's achievement in this pithy endorsement: "Thorough." And the Amazon entry

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Roger Kimball, editor of the *New Criterion*, is the author, most recently, of *The Fortunes of Permanence: Culture and Anarchy in an Age of Amnesia*.

## Reasons to Vote For Democrats

*A Comprehensive Guide*

by Michael J. Knowles

CreateSpace, 266 pp., \$9.44 (paperback)

calls *Reasons* "the most exhaustively researched and coherently argued Democrat Party apologia to date." I think that is about right, and one of the 2,000 or so Amazon reviews, expands on this assessment:

In this poetic work, I have found what my heart has felt, but my words could never express. He captures the very soul of the Democratic party with a profundity of insight I never would have thought to find in a fellow cis-gendered male. This is more than the petty political rants that dominate the bestseller list. Within these pages lies the fundamental substance and logic behind placing equality of outcome over equality of opportunity, defining one's beliefs according to the content of one's loins or the melanin levels of one's skin, accommodating and inviting mass immigration from cultures that hate us, and the ultimate truth that every material necessity is a fundamental human right that the government must provide at the expense of the one percent.

I can't improve upon that—although I do think that the reviewer who observed that "there are NO WORDS to describe how informative this book is" also caught an important part of its charm.

Even works of political philosophy have an aesthetic, or stylistic, dimension, and Knowles is also to be commended on his achievement in strictly literary terms. "Brevity," as Polonius remarked to Gertrude and Claudius, "is the soul of wit." Knowles has matched matter and message with rare economy

in *Reasons*. Gertrude would not be able to retort to him as she did to Polonius: "More matter, with less art."

But it is for the substance of his analysis that Knowles's study will be remembered. The fact is that in the aftermath of the most divisive presidential election in modern memory, much commentary, on the right as well the left, has been hampered by an obtuse verbosity and trammled by a tired allegiance to shopworn categories of political analysis. Michael Knowles has definitively transcended the usual narratives that proved almost comically wrongheaded in attempting to explain the metabolism of the 2016 election. He is especially convincing in laying out the various rationales marshaled by Democrats to sell their programs to the country. He digs deeply into both Hillary Clinton's and Bernie Sanders's platforms, showing, despite the stark differences in their rhetoric, the deep continuities that made them all but indistinguishable to American voters.

As Donald Trump contemplates a palatable replacement for Obamacare, revamps the country's immigration laws, and sparks a renaissance in job growth and economic vitality, Knowles's detailed exegesis of the Democratic alternatives on these and other issues will help ordinary citizens put the differences between the parties into useful perspective. No party has all the answers to the exigent issues that face America in the 21st century, but Knowles's careful unpacking of the Democrats' real agenda enables us to see clearly what is at stake in the partisan debates that have mesmerized the country. No candidate is above criticism, but Knowles shows, with inarguable thoroughness, that there really were important differences between what the parties had to offer.

In fact, I suspect that *Reasons to Vote for Democrats* will prove to be even more valuable for Democrats and progressives than for Republicans. To quote *Hamlet* once more, the book manages to "hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form

and pressure." Conservatives, having lived through the Obama years, and a brutal election season, may not find all that much that is new here; for them, I suspect, it will serve mostly as a useful handbook or reference work, a sort of political Baedeker.

But for Democrats, it is sure to come as a revelation. Citing chapter and verse, going behind the usual pieties of the pundits, it lays bare with forthright (if sparing) candor the real motor of contemporary Democratic ambitions for the country. No one having read this book

will be in any doubt about what the Democratic alternative really looks like.

Some Amazon commentators have wondered whether an audio version will soon be available. Since *Reasons to Vote for Democrats*, apart from its front matter, chapter headings, and bibliography, is entirely blank, I doubt that Audible, or any of the other major audio book outlets, will offer a commercial version. But who knows? John Cage's 4'33" is widely available on YouTube, so there may yet be hope for an audio version. ♦



# The Gospel Dance

*A novel of ideas to fill the biblical vacuum.*

BY PARKER BAUER

**J**M. Coetzee is a singular case. Born in South Africa, he grew up there and has dilated on his childhood near Cape Town and on his uncle's farm in several autobiographical works. He won expansive praise for his early novels philosophizing on racial intolerance in his native country, then got the cold shoulder from the African National Congress for (it was alleged) sustaining racial stereotypes. When he won the Nobel Prize, the ANC hastened to reclaim him—by which time he had moved to Australia.

"My intellectual allegiances," he has said, "are clearly European, not African." Or maybe, as in this new novel, merely earthly. *The Schooldays of Jesus* is an echoing ossuary of a story: mostly dialogue, minimal plot, bare-bones description. Think Beckett, but with a bit of the marrow of meaning.

In a nameless country lies the town of Estrella, whose near-rhyme with Australia teases the ear. But it can't be Australia, since the language is Spanish. Beyond the city there's a farm with a band of migrant workers and a nondescript lake with a wedge of

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## The Schooldays of Jesus

by J.M. Coetzee  
Viking, 272 pp., \$27

beach, everything lit as if by a bank of fluorescent lamps. To the farm comes a cobbled-together family: 6-year-old David; a man named Simón, who is not really his father but dutifully protects him; and Inés, the woman whom Simón believes, without much evidence, is David's mother, and who may be a lesbian. They're lying low, evading authorities who might take the boy away. For a time Simón picks fruit, then they risk a move to Estrella to enroll David in school.

"Jesus" appears nowhere here except in the title; clearly, though, David is our boy, his name hinting at the line of David to which Jesus belonged. The points of attachment with the Gospels are plain, yet seem no more than pegs holding down a wind-whipped tent; there is no sustained biblical analogy. The novel undertakes to flesh out the sort of story the biblical accounts omit: how

it was that the boy grew up, what he said, thought, and did—but in an emptied setting neither Jewish nor Greek nor anything else. He pouts and poses insolent challenges to the stupor of Estrellan society: “Why is staying alive more important than anything?” Unlike Simón and the others, he does not “accept that what our eyes see is the only life there is.” All role models fail him, none adequate to the project of individuation (as Jung would have it) that opens before him.

David lands in “an academy devoted to the training of the soul through music and dance,” conducted by a couple named Arroyo who have a special entrée to the spheres or simply are spaced out, we’re not sure which. The celestial beauty Ana Magdalena Arroyo teaches the students an esoteric form of ballet. Their dancing calls down numbers from the stars—not the integers of mere arithmetic but *real* numbers, reason’s reverse, which, called down, dance with the dancers. Not only that, but Ana escorts the class on an outing to the lake, where Simón, having gone for a look, finds her and the children splashing in the nude.

Soon the dreamy, obdurate David wants to move out of his nominal parents’ apartment and board at the school. As in all things, he gets his way. The Arroyos understand him, he says, as his parents do not: “You act as his father,” wonders Señor Arroyo to Simón, “yet you do not know who he is?” Inés scoffs at the notion of “dancing to the stars as a substitute for learning one’s multiplication tables.”

This book continues the narrative of Coetzee’s earlier *The Childhood of Jesus*, which some found mystifying to the point of not being a novel at all. In truth, both books are old-fashioned novels of ideas—the sort of thing that Mary McCarthy accused Henry James of just about killing off. The ideas are metaphysical, perhaps stretching McCarthy’s point. Coetzee unfolds them like flowers within flowers, each one pushing forth the next, David questioning without end.

David worries that he might be a ghost—a nod to the proposition, as

in Buddhism, that all is illusory. No, Simón assures him, a bit glibly: “You are real and I am real.” All the answers will come clear in the next life, says Simón, with Pauline aplomb. David: “I don’t want to go to the next life. I want to go to the stars.”

Inevitably, there comes the question of evil: its provenance, its perverse kinship with the good. At the heart of the story is a monstrous crime of passion. Dmitri, a guard at a museum near the school and a man of ungovernable passion, commits the crime or, seen differently, performs it. Love and hate are indivisible, he pleads. David peers down, godlike, on the corpse in a basement cubicle. David was—is—Dmitri’s friend, and according to Dmitri, “each of us desires to kill the beloved but only a few elect souls have the courage to act on their desire.”

Dmitri, it strikes us, does not have a Spanish name; nor does Alyosha, Ana’s handsome, benign assistant at

the school. In name as well as in character, Dmitri and Alyosha correspond to two of the siblings in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dmitri, whether Coetzee’s or Dostoevsky’s, stands trial on a lofty stage—stands, that is, for all humanity in his passion and his mingling of good and evil. Coetzee tenders a reverie on passion, on desire suffused with suffering. As Alyosha frames it: “What is it that we lack when we lack nothing, when we are sufficient unto ourselves? What is it that we miss when we are not in love?”

In the courtroom, where he has gotten in against the wishes of Simón, David alone rises in defense of Dmitri, but is not allowed to speak. Dmitri, his crime aside, is capable of love—as the rational, passionless Simón is not.

The judge goads the accused to defend himself. The crowd demands punishment. Does Coetzee submit this as a parable, or a parody, of the Passion itself? *¿Quién sabe?* ♦



## Fascists in Love

*What, exactly, was Mussolini’s mistress thinking?*

BY JUDY BACHRACH

**O**n Christmas Day 1937, a famous national leader, then 54 years old, wrote his mistress the following billet-doux:

Darling you are enough for me. Do you realize that I don’t do anything except think of you? Morning, evening and night. For example if at night I wake up and go down to piss, a lot of the time I am so drowsy I do it on the floor. Then you come into my mind and I think: If only you were here. . . . I am really amazed that I think of you so much.

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**Claretta**  
*Mussolini’s Last Lover*  
by R.J.B. Bosworth  
Yale, 320 pp., \$28

Personally, I am really amazed that Benito Mussolini—yes, he is the famous author of the above passage—got anyone into his bed, ever. But as R.J.B. Bosworth points out, and at considerable length, Il Duce somehow managed this with both astonishing frequency and an equally surprising assortment of women, some high-born, others less so. Maria José, who would ultimately become queen of Italy, was one; Margherita Sarfatti, a Jewish journalist who grew up in a

palazzo in Venice, was another—although by 1938, when Mussolini’s infamous Race Laws were implemented, he was openly regretting the latter.

But the most persistent, passionate, and foolish among his many conquests was Claretta Petacci, in 1926 a silly bourgeois girl of 14 when she wrote Mussolini her first mash note on the occasion of a failed assassination attempt against the leader—“O Duce, why was I not with you? . . . Duce, my life is for you. . . . My super great Duce, our life, our hope, our glory”—and later, an even sillier woman throughout her abbreviated epistolary existence. Time and again, Mussolini ordered Claretta to destroy his rambling letters. But how could she? She “wept with joy and emotion,” Claretta wrote him, when she learned “by chance that Hitler called you his ‘most faithful friend.’” As things turned out—in so many ways, not least during Claretta’s final hours—her life really *was* for him.

Of course, the reader may justifiably wonder on finishing *Claretta* what, exactly, “Ben” (as Claretta liked to call him) actually offered women in the way of appeal. He had five legitimate children, and nine who were not. At home, his betrayed wife Rachele was expected to call him *professore*, although Mussolini’s intellectual achievements were limited. (It was, for instance, his opinion that although Ludwig van Beethoven was a talented composer, it was “a shame that he was a Jew. Great but still a Jew.”) As for Mussolini’s lovemaking, it was accompanied by bloody bites and severe scratches inflicted on poor Claretta (who wrote everything down; she was that kind of girl) along with promises of more violence to come: “I want to thrash you, harm you, be brutal with you. . . . I am a wild animal.” He was the kind of man who believed that the artificial insemination of cattle was unfair—to the cattle.

True, Benito Mussolini, vicious, meanspirited fascist though he was, managed for quite some time to seduce



Claretta Petacci (1936)

not just women but an entire nation, and then plunge that nation into a disastrous war alongside yet another vicious dictator. But alas, there are women who like that kind of bullish, unleashed power, both in and out of bed. And they are not alone.

As I know only too well, since I spend a fair amount of time in Rome each year, Rai Storia, Italy’s History Channel, scarcely lets a week go by without airing some piece of documentary footage featuring Mussolini: his manic speeches, his violent death, his brutality, his intricate personal life. And when that’s not being broadcast, there’s inevitably some half-hankie docudrama about impetuous, difficult, passionate Edda, Mussolini’s favorite child, who wears beautiful furs in her role as the Contessa di Cortellazzo e Buccari, but is unhappy in love. (The series does boast a bittersweet ending, of sorts: By the end of World War II, Edda manages to escape to Switzerland, which is the good news—for Edda. Disguised as a peasant woman, however,

she is forced to ditch the furs.)

So R.J.B. Bosworth is not wrong when he writes that “Italians have shown themselves more readily won over than their sometime German allies by dulcified accounts of dictatorship.” It is, for example, still illegal in Italy to give a fascist salute “‘to exalt exponents, principles, and methods’ of the extinct National Fascist Party,” as Italian law has it. But trust me: The mythological Mussolini lives on and on, as does fascism. And this longevity is even more astonishing when you consider Mussolini’s minimal physical appeal: Square-built and stocky, he had button eyes and a bullet-shaped head framed by a shaved pate and fearsome jutting chin. Of these drawbacks, however, he was astonishingly unaware: Like Vladimir Putin, Mussolini enjoyed displaying his physique during excursions by the sea.

Obviously, there were compensations for Claretta. Where did the couple make love? In the gilded and star-spangled Zodiac Room in the Palazzo Venezia—the same palazzo from which Mussolini delivered his rabid monologues to cheering crowds. How did Claretta get there without being seen? In a car driven by the family chauffeur, with either her mother or father in attendance. (The father, a physician, had many uses, it turns out: When the Duce grew concerned that the approach of war might dampen his lovemaking ardor, Doctor Petacci prescribed German-made Hormovin, “the Viagra of its time,” as the author observes.)

What was Claretta’s preferred venue? Bed, you will not be surprised to learn, where, “armed with a box of chocolates,” she spent most of her mornings. Her preferred acquisitions? Jewels, furs, and Lanvin perfumes, even though these last luxuries were foreign and, therefore, nominally banned. What happened to her husband, Riccardo Federici, an air force lieutenant whose ambitions Claretta supported, even though he didn’t have

JULSTEIN BILD / GETTY IMAGES

much use for her? He got promoted, thanks to Mussolini.

Naturally, there were scenes—in war and peace, by no means unusual in Italy. Claretta was so jealous of the other women in Ben’s life that she spied on them. Rachele was so jealous of Claretta that in late 1944, the unhappy wife arrived at her rival’s villa at 10 in the morning where (finding Claretta still in a negligée) she screamed the word “whore” any number of times, adding: “Signora, I am no longer young and I know it. But believe me, if the Duce saw you at the moment, without all the make-up, he would not consider you any more as his idol.”

At which point, Claretta fainted several times, revived only by cognac. This was actually not unusual for her. In December of that same year, she wrote Mussolini that after tuning in to one of his last diatribes, she was, she reported, “on my knees before your voice,” having “sustained you with my soul, with the violent beating of my heart as I listened enraptured . . . a shudder froze me, and I cried, throbbled.” Then she fainted. Again.

What to make, then, of *Claretta: Mussolini’s Last Lover*? Well, it is certainly dense and packed with incident narrated, quite often, by Claretta’s own throbbing voice. But I am sorry to say that when you have a perpetually fainting, shuddering sap for a subject, it’s difficult to keep interest from flagging. You just don’t want to see another letter—not from him, not from her. And evidently, Claretta herself was of similar mind. By the very end—this would be late April 1945—when Mussolini was captured by partisans near Lake Lugano, and Claretta, wearing a stylish mink, suddenly popped up uninvited (“perhaps to his mute surprise,” as Bosworth observes), the two lovers had a final explosive argument about one of his other girlfriends. Then Claretta grabbed a surprised partisan by the hand and declared imploringly: “I want to die with him. . . . That’s all I am asking: to die with him.”

It is at this juncture that the reader thinks: Good idea. And the partisans felt the same. ♦

BCA

# How Swift Saw It

*A singular vision of the Anglo-Irish landscape.*

BY MALCOLM FORBES

Jonathan Swift was a man of contradictions. He was born in Ireland yet was embarrassed by the fact and maintained that he was English. As a clergyman he held in contempt anyone who threatened the dogma and sanctity of his church, but as one of the sharpest satirists of his day he railed against authority, skewering and shaming the proud, the vicious, and the hypocritical. He was severe and commanding in print and the pulpit yet convivial and sensitive in his personal relationships. He was fastidious about his personal hygiene—contrary to fashion, regularly bathing and changing his underwear—but dealt obsessively in his writing with dirt, decay, and bodily functions. He was a pessimist with little faith in humanity, who once believed life was a thing to be despised—and yet at the same time he saw his stock-in-trade, satire, as a means for improving society: “a public Spirit, prompting Men of *Genius* and *Virtue*, to mend the World as far as they are able.”

In this magisterial biography, John Stubbs describes his subject as, at one and the same moment, “a stern authoritarian and a daring cultural bandit,” a divisive figure who “provoked admiration and resentment in equal measure.” Stubbs teases out Swift’s contradictions, lays bare his eccentricities and polarizing thoughts and deeds, and flags up the injurious myths that have surrounded and sullied the great essayist, poet, political pamphleteer, cleric—and, of course, author of *Gulliver’s Travels*.

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**Jonathan Swift**  
*The Reluctant Rebel*  
by John Stubbs  
Norton, 752 pp., \$39.95

After Swift’s death, his reputation plummeted, and in later years he was demonized by the likes of William Makepeace Thackeray, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. By exhaustively examining both his life and work against seismic 18th-century Anglo-Irish upheavals, Stubbs provides a valuable, necessary corrective. If he doesn’t entirely soften Swift’s rough edges then he goes some way toward dispelling the perceived image of him as “a hater of the human.”

Swift was born in Dublin in 1667 to English parents. His father had died several months earlier from a disease caught from a “foul bed.” Not long after his birth Swift was abducted by his wet nurse and taken to Whitehaven in England. According to his autobiographical account—somewhat “questionable” for Stubbs—his mother sent orders “by all means not to hazard a second voyage, till he could be better able to bear it.” When he returned to Ireland, three years later, he was able to read the Bible—almost as mean a feat as “Mammoth” Gulliver’s learning the language of Lilliput in three weeks. This Ireland-England return trip was not to be a one-off expedition for Swift: Stubbs notes that “emotionally as well as physically his life passed going back and forth between the two islands, a prisoner of the Irish Sea.”

Swift remained in Ireland for the main part of his education, underperforming at school in Kilkenny and

limping towards a degree with manifest “Dullness and Insufficiency” at Trinity College, Dublin. At the age of 21 he left—or as Stubbs has it, “fled”—his homeland again for England, this time to Moor Park House in Surrey to work as private secretary for the retired statesman Sir William Temple. Aside from strengthening his affinity towards England, his stay there brought about two pivotal, character-shaping passions that would last a lifetime: First, he began writing, albeit not yet publishing; and second, he started a friendship that would become a relationship with Temple’s housekeeper’s daughter, Esther Johnson.

More to-and-fro was to ensue. In 1694, Swift departed Moor Park to be ordained in Dublin. Resuming life with the Temples two years later, he commenced tutoring the now-15-year-old Esther and produced his first major work, *A Tale of a Tub*, a parodic, digressive, yet wholehearted defense of the Established Church. After Temple died, Swift set sail for Dublin in 1699 with a new aristocratic patron, the Earl of Berkeley, and in the role of chaplain, looked after the earl’s family in their private devotions. London beckoned again, in 1701, where for over a decade Swift shone as a leading literary light—or as he described himself, “a person distinguished for poetical and other writings.”

Those other writings took the form of essays and pamphlets that amused and chastised. With scalpel-sharp wit, Swift cut away artifice and pretension to expose folly and vice, and with perfectly aimed blows he felled the pompous and corrupt high and mighty from their plinths. In 1710, he honed his craft at the *Examiner*, a regular polemical newspaper for the Tory government, and in 1714, helped found the Scriblerus Club, an association of prominent men of letters of the Augustan Age, whose members included Swift’s friends Alexander Pope, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot.

Finally, when Swift was appointed dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, in 1713, the flitting backwards and forwards came to an end. He would

have preferred a deanery in one of England’s principal cathedrals, but he took what he was offered and remained in Dublin until his death in 1745.

Not that those last years were entirely clerical ecclesiastical. After starting out appalled at the condition of “this beggarly city,” he gradually began to stand up for weak, impoverished Ireland and protest English oppression. A man who was known to many simply as “The Dean” in time earned the worthier title of “hero.” *Gulliver’s Travels* appeared in 1726, and blended within its tall tales and hijinks was ruthless state-of-the-nation criticism, condemnation for the horrors of imperialism, and despair at human depravity. Three years later, Swift produced the shorter, but more pungent, satire *A Modest Proposal*, in which an insane social reformer comes up with a way of providing for Ireland’s poor and hungry: “A young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; whether Stewed, Roasted, Baked or Boiled.”

Stubbs previously excelled with a biography of another literary cleric, John Donne, *The Reformed Soul*. His life of Swift is just as absorbing, the product of thorough research, shrewd analysis, and sympathetic treatment. The book only suffers when Stubbs opts to pan out and veer off, switching from portrait to panorama. He is right to contextualize Swift’s life with descriptive backdrops and informative backstories, but the drawback is that his subject is occasionally deafened by the roar of history, or lost completely to disquisitions on political strife and ecclesiastical struggle. Swift is born in chapter one but Stubbs leaves his childhood until chapter two, spending his first 30 pages navigating the lie of the land in Ireland and tracing the course of the Civil War in England.

Stubbs is at his most riveting when his focal point is Swift, “the Doctor and Dean, the terror of ministers and magnates.” Whether finding his feet as a writer, tearing strips off rivals, or withering in old age, Swift looms large—

Broddingnagian—on the page. Stubbs is particularly effective at evaluating Swift’s relations with women. Several “heart-blasting” letters show him savagely casting off female admirers—although Stubbs argues that Swift’s cruelty was a kind of crude kindness, a distancing mechanism, for he was not the marrying type. This didn’t prevent him from falling for, and becoming intimate with, Esther Vanhomrigh—the “Stella” in Swift’s *Journal to Stella*—and Esther Johnson, whom he nicknamed “Vanessa.” Stubbs describes Esther Johnson as “a stray comet, skirting Swift’s planetary system in an orbit that might prove destructive every time she reappeared.” Esther Vanhomrigh, assumed by some to be Swift’s mistress and others to be his secret wife, was “his chief comfort in a world that often exasperated him.”

People and place were the source of that exasperation, and Stubbs throws light on another gray area in Swift’s life: his hostility towards, and later grudging affection for, Ireland. Stubbs declares that Ireland was Swift’s “personal, emotional shorthand for all that was amiss with the circumstances of his life; a panoply of wrongs that included, incidentally, the sins of England.”

In *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*, a sardonic, self-penned obituary published six years before he died, Swift reflects on his life and imagines others assessing his achievements and his legacy:

*The Dean was famous in his time,  
And had a kind of knack at rhyme.  
His way of writing now is past:  
The town has got a better taste.*

There is similar self-deprecation (and hints at oblivion) in *A Tale of a Tub*, when Swift notes that due to an overabundance of writers, all “hurried so hastily off the Scene, that they escape our Memory, and delude our Sight.” Swift ruffled feathers and incurred wrath during his lifetime, and has been branded mad, misogynistic, and misanthropic since his death. But he has never escaped our memory, and *Gulliver’s Travels* has never been out of print. In this definitive biography, 350 years on from his birth, Swift remains stirringly, thrillingly alive. ♦

# Perchance to Dream

*Shakespeare's Danish drama plays the world.*

BY CHRISTOPHER ATAMIAN



*'Hamlet' in Bangkok (2015)*

If there were ever any doubt that *Hamlet* is the greatest of all Shakespeare plays—even perhaps the greatest play ever written—then Dominic Dromgoole's newest book puts any discussion to rest. In 2014, to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, Dromgoole, then artistic director of London's Globe Theatre Company, devised a brilliant if insanely ambitious plan: to tour *Hamlet* to every country in the world. Two years, 193,000 miles, and 190-plus countries later, the Globe actors and staff had pulled off this remarkable feat with characteristic professional aplomb.

Thankfully, given the amount of planning and administrative tedium that must have been involved in such a grand undertaking, the author doesn't spend too much time explaining the logistics of organizing the trip itself. The Globe actors performed in blazing deserts and under a blinding thunderstorm in an outdoor theater

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## Hamlet Globe to Globe

*Two Years, 193,000 Miles,  
197 Countries, One Play*  
by Dominic Dromgoole  
Grove, 320 pp., \$27

in Prague; they braved an Ebola epidemic in Africa and overcame defective theatrical sets in Poland. They also came into intimate contact with the truly weird—most notably the military base of Djibouti, where they were surrounded by secret service agents from at least three world powers, and a tour of an Addis Ababa mansion owned by a peculiar Frenchman who singlehandedly runs the city's diplomatic life. In Mexico, the entire troupe came down with an epic case of the runs and the apparent mother-of-all-stomach-viruses.

Everywhere they went, the 12 actors were welcomed with open arms. In one of the most touching moments in this book, the troupe performed in front of Syrian refugees who had lost almost everything and now lived in

a camp in Zaatari, Jordan. I can't say that I was too surprised to read of their success: Shakespeare is loved around the world, and no one does Shakespeare better than the Globe. I visited Armenia a few years back and was astounded by the number of natives I met named "Gamlet" ("Hamlet" in Armenian), "Cordelia," "Ophelia," and other Shakespearean names.

In order to pull off this 24-month tour, the company selected actors who could play multiple roles: three Ophelias, three Poloniuses, and so on. Ladi Emeruwa and Naeem Hayat were brought on board to play Hamlet himself, joined by John Dougall, Keith Bartlett, Rawiri Paratene, Tom Lawrence, Beruce Khan, Miranda Foster, Amanda Wilkin, Phoebe Fildes, Jennifer Leong, and Matthew Romain. (Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst directed, joined by four stage managers.)

Why *Hamlet*? According to Dromgoole, because it is the perfect play, and one that stands the test of time, geography, and presentation. *Who's there? To be or not to be?*—a seemingly endless plethora of famous lines all spring from this singular source. With stunning monosyllabic riddles-within-riddles, and lines that give every actor an uncanny freedom of interpretation, *Hamlet* is a play of unlimited linguistic wealth. Others that didn't pass the test include *Macbeth* (too dark) and *Romeo and Juliet* (disappointing third act).

*Globe to Globe* is roughly divided into geographical sections according to the travel schedule: Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, North America, and so on. It's a grueling trip and, towards the end, we begin to feel some of the actors' fatigue. But along the way we're privy to a host of amusing stories and biographical anecdotes, and Dromgoole's wit and English sarcasm turn his narrative into a fun read. What makes it truly worthwhile, however, is his inclusion in each chapter of a meditation on *Hamlet* itself: a history of the players who first performed it in the 17th century; a disquisition on meter and rhyme; a short description of early traveling troupes in Europe, his evaluation of filmed versions of the play. ♦

“NCAA ends North Carolina ban after repeal of ‘bathroom bill’”

—CNN

PARODY

“San Francisco bars travel to South Dakota for city employees, because of state law said to discriminate against LGBT”

—News item

APRIL 18, 2017

EVERYTHING CLEAR CHEAP

# SUCCESS IN NORTH CAROLINA SPARKS WAVE OF BOYCOTTS

*States target each other over cheese, whiskey, and more*

By PETRA ZBRUVA

WASHINGTON — Inspired by the success of the boycott against North Carolina, a number of states and cities have launched new bans to advance progressive initiatives.

The District of Columbia, one of the localities to pioneer fees for plastic bags at grocery stores, has announced it will now prohibit government officials and employees from visiting states—including Arizona and Idaho—that have blocked efforts to impose fees on plastic grocery bags and other “auxiliary containers.” Washington mayor Mariel Boozer said, “We can no longer stand idly by as supermarket clerks ask, ‘Will that be paper or plastic?’”

California has organized a coalition, including Colorado, Illinois, and New Jersey, to ban products from states that do not extend in-state college tuition rates to undocumented students. Their first target is Tennessee, which has so far failed to pass the proposed Tuition Opportunity Act. Officers with the California ABC spread out across the state this month enforcing the removal of Jack Daniels from liquor store shelves. “Jack drinkers have had to switch to bourbon,” said James Ellicott Wordsworth III, owner of Bingo’s Package Liquor in Modesto. “I don’t know what we’ll be able to sell once the state gets around to looking at the laws of Kentucky.”

The California-led Tennessee boycott has also had an impact on radio airplay. “We received a cease-and-desist letter from Sacramento telling us we can’t play anything from Nashville,” said Reginald



NEWS.COM

A shipment of contraband cheese seized by Vermont authorities before its transportation to California is destroyed in Waterford, Vermont, April 5, 2017.

Thomson, program director of Central Valley country station “Yee-Haw” 108.5 FM. “The only things we’ve been able to air for the last three weeks have been a couple of old Buck Owens discs recorded in Bakersfield. It’s a problem.”

Though a leader of multiple state boycotts, California has not escaped being boycotted itself. Outraged by the common Hollywood practice of “whitewashing,” Vermont has declared a statewide ban on shipping cheese to Los Angeles County until California passes legislation to prohibit Tinseltown from casting actors of the incorrect ethnicity in film and television roles. The issue was highlighted by the

recent film “Ghost in the Shell,” in which the non-Asian actress Scarlett Johansson played a character that in the original manga comic book had been Japanese. “That would be like us taking a sharp cheddar and labeling it parmesan,” said Woodstock mayor Arlo Marley.

Not all local boycotts have been in support of progressive issues. Detroit mayor Relve Uringen has barred representatives of Motor City from doing business with any city that has instituted bike lanes. “The bicycle is a menace,” said Mayor Uringen, “to the American way of

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