Noah Feldman: Trump’s Legal Swamp

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CINEMA ISSUE

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Penis Envy and Other Bad Feelings
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TERENCE MCGEEWEN
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Lotte in Weimar

Babylon Berlin
A television series created by Tom Tykwer, Achim von Borries, and Hendrik Handloegten, based on the novels by Volker Kutscher, available on Netflix

Babylon Berlin: Book 1 of the Gereon Rath Mystery Series
by Volker Kutscher, translated from the German by Niall Sellar, Picador, 423 pp., $17.00 (paper)

Alexandra Stanley

Somewhere between decadent dance halls, S&M trysts, mob slayings, opium dens, and cafes full of drunkards and beggars, the streets of Berlin are teeming with the old order. Bruno has flares of humanity but no scruples about beating prisoners, taking money from brothel owners, or blackmailing girls for sexual favors and information. He is gruffly friendly to Rath, but he also suspects that the young detective, whose father is a highly placed police official in Cologne, has a hidden agenda. Rath indeed does, and as they draw nearer to at least some of his many other secrets, which include PTSD from combat in the last war and a morbid fascination with corpses, Rath says that Charlotte is a good-looking stenographeer who aspires to go to law school, and that’s about it. The sixteen episodes of Babylon Berlin now available on Netflix are not loosely based on the novels so much as packed with additional scene-setting, character, and mood. It is as if Kutscher had handed the showrunners a neatly cut planked pine, which they then bleached and brushed with layer after layer of lacquer to attain a higher sheen. The degree of invention they bring to the material makes the series an example of how long-form television can expand and improve on fiction. It has the time and space to turn even a short book into a roman fleuve.

In the show, Charlotte is first shown getting ready for work in her father’s household after being up all night at a club. Her sister asks if she’s tired. “If you sleep you miss being awake,” Charlotte says. The bathroom mirror has long since been reduced to shards. Charlotte takes a used wad of gum from under a shelf and uses it to fix her comb-pact mirror at eye level above the sink and reapply her makeup. As she leaves the building, her little sister tosses a silk stocking out the window, which lands on a shelf, and the visiting French foreign minister Gustav Stresemann, who fled Germany in 1933, defined Weimar culture. But the inclusion of Stresemann is also important to this portrait of the early 1920s, which featured the 1926 Nobel Peace Prize with Briand and to this day is remembered in Germany as a stabilizing force in the Weimar chaos, part of its de-only mythology, his friends and enemies cite as a factor in Hitler’s rise to power.

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Crooked Trump?
Noah Feldman

The investigation of Michael Cohen, a lawyer and sometime fixer for Donald Trump, marks the start of a new phase in the unraveling of Trump's presidency. Until now, the only Justice Department investigation of Trump has been conducted by special counsel Robert Mueller. Mueller's appointment letter authorizes him to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election and crimes arising from it. Any wrongdoing that is not connected to this interference arguably falls outside Mueller's scope. In contrast, the Cohen investigation is taking place not under Mueller, but under the authority of the US attorney for the Southern District of New York. The Southern District is not restricted by any appointment letter, and its career attorneys have a mandate to uncover any criminal activity within their jurisdiction, whenever it may have occurred and for whatever purpose.

In the Cohen investigation, the FBI and federal prosecutors are seeking to break the confidentiality of Cohen and Trump's attorney-client relationship. To do this, they must either show that Cohen was not genuinely acting as Trump's attorney or that the two men's communications were made with the intention of committing or covering up a crime or fraud. The fact that the Southern District prosecutors have already convinced a judge to issue a search warrant on one or both of these bases means they are likely to get access to much material that would otherwise have been unavailable because of attorney-client privilege.

Longtime Trump observers immediately began speculating that the prosecutors will find information that could implicate Trump himself in criminal conduct—or that Cohen could testify against Trump in exchange for a reduced sentence. Potential crimes start with the possibility that Cohen violated federal election law, if he paid the porn actress Stormy Daniels $130,000 to remain silent about an affair with Trump without receiving repayment from Trump or the Trump campaign. The payment could be deemed an unreported donation to a campaign, which is a federal crime. Other possible crimes include structuring payments to avoid bank-reporting requirements—a commonly charged felony—or money-laundering related to the purchase and sale of Trump properties.

The legal route to holding Trump criminally liable for Cohen's actions lies in the law of conspiracy. Since Cohen acted as a fixer for Trump, investigators could discover that on some occasions he acted criminally on Trump's behalf. If so, a prosecutor could charge that Cohen and Trump were engaged in a criminal conspiracy, defined as an agreement to commit crimes in concert. Once two or more people have agreed to the general plan of action, any crime committed to advance the conspiracy counts as a crime for which both are criminally responsible—even if one acts without the other's knowledge. For example, if Trump and Cohen criminally agreed to intimidate Stormy Daniels, and Cohen arranged for her to be threatened, then Trump could be charged with that threat, even if he did not know anything about it.

To make matters worse for Trump, there is little he can do to thwart the new investigation. Unlike the Mueller investigation, which Trump could end himself, the Cohen investigation in the Southern District would be extremely difficult for the White House to shut down. Trump could in principle fire the US attorney, a political appointee who serves at his pleasure, and appoint someone new with orders to end the Cohen inquiry. The civil servant prosecutors of the Southern District, however, cannot be fired except for misconduct. The strong tradition of prosecutorial independence means that, even if ordered to stop their investigation by Trump or a new US attorney, they would very likely treat such a directive as itself a criminal obstruction of justice and find a way to keep digging.

Nor can Trump end the inquiry just by pardoning Cohen. All that would mean is that prosecutors would be able to force Cohen to testify by issuing a subpoena against him. Technically, Cohen could not invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate himself, because he would not be in jeopardy of a criminal conviction after the pardon. If Cohen refused to submit to the subpoena, he could be jailed for contempt of court—to which the pardon would not apply. Federal prosecutors, then, could ultimately gather sufficient evidence to charge Donald Trump with crimes related to campaign contributions, structuring financial transactions, money-laundering, or conspiracy. These would be ordinary crimes, not connected to Russian election interference, not investigated by Mueller, and not anticipated when the FBI investigation of the 2016 election began.

These possible charges raise two pressing questions. May a sitting president be criminally indicted and tried for his crimes while in office? And may a president be impeached for criminal conduct that occurred before his presidency and had nothing to do with it?

Formally, these questions are separate, and they could be addressed independently of each other. But the best resolution of the first actually depends on the answer to the second. The Constitution should not be read to allow a sitting president who has committed serious crimes to hide behind his office and avoid accountability for them. Thus it would not be necessary to prosecute a sitting president if he may be impeached for crimes having nothing to do with his office. But if the Constitution only allows impeachment for crimes related to his office, then we ought to allow prosecution of a sitting president for unrelated crimes.

May a sitting president be indicted by a federal grand jury and prosecuted?2 This question has not been answered in practice because no one has tried to do it. The grand jury investigating the Watergate cover-up named Richard Nixon as an unindicted coconspirator: the prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, observed he had sufficient evidence to indict Nixon for criminal acts but chose not to do so. That let him avoid the constitutional question of whether the president could be prosecuted while impeachment proceedings to begin—proceedings that convinced Nixon to resign.

Ordinarily, a conspirator bears full criminal liability for the acts of all other participants in a conspiracy. The option of making it clear that Trump is subject to liability of this kind would be available to the Southern District prosecutors. Indeed, it would be the path of least resistance for them. By naming Trump as an unindicted coconspirator, they could communicate their belief in his guilt without precipitating a constitutional crisis by indicting him and daring him to claim that he was legally immune from prosecution.

Despite the fact that a sitting president has never been indicted, the constitutionality of doing so has been extensively debated outside the courts. On one side, unsurprisingly, are the special prosecutors Mohamed Atta, who submitted to the Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox a memorandum from the liberal law professor John Hart Ely advising him that the president could be indicted while in office.3 (Jaworski, who succeeded Cox after the Saturday Night Massacre, chose not to indict Nixon once impeachment proceedings had begun; his team was apparently divided on the issue.) During the Whitewater investigation, Kenneth Starr solicited a memorandum from the conservative law professor Ronald Rotunda arguing at length that a sitting president could be indicted and convicted by the independent prosecutor.4

On the other side, also unsurprisingly, is the Department of Justice, acting on behalf of the president's interest. In 1973 the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) produced an internal memorandum concluding that all executive branch officials could be prosecuted while in office except the president, who was uniquely immune. Robert Bork, then solicitor general, echoed this view the same year in a filing connected to the indictment of Vice President Spiro Agnew on tax evasion and other charges; Bork maintained that no one has ever tried to indict and prosecute but the president could.

Most of the debates on this question focus on federal, not state, indictment, which raises different questions. Because the Southern District investigation is federal, I focus on that issue. But even that raises the question of whether a president could be indicted but not prosecuted until after he left office; I have not addressed this issue for reasons of space.


3 Timothy O'Brien, author of the biography TrumpNation: The Art of Being the Donald (Warren, 2005), has argued in Bloomberg View that Cohen may not have been privy to or participated in business schemes of questionable legality.
Gagosian New York

JONAS WOOD

Prints
not. In 2000, the OLC reconsidered the issue and wrote a new memorandum affirming its prior view that the Constitution precludes the indictment of a sitting president. That document is not currently functions as binding guidance within the Department of Justice, which means that the Southern District of New York is likely free to try to indict Trump.

The basis for the view that the president can be indicted is that no one is above the law. In Roman law, the emperors were only outside and above the legal process: Prætector legibus solutus est, says the Code of Justinian. In contrast, republicanism holds that the president is merely first among equals. To allow him to avoid criminal responsibility for his conduct would be a manifestation of hierarchical monarchism, not egalitarian democracy.

Legally, the two strongest precedents on this side of the argument derive from the investigations of Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. In holding that Nixon had to produce the Watergate tapes, the Supreme Court weighed the independent interests of the executive branch against the judiciary’s interest in executing the criminal law—and found in favor of the judiciary. The Court went out of its way to say that it was not deciding whether the president could be named as an unindicted coconspirator, let alone prosecuted. Nevertheless, the fact that the Court considered criminal justice more important than the executive’s claim of privilege—in a situation in which prosecution was deemed likely to bring down the president—supports the idea of subjecting the president to prosecution in the interest of justice.

In 1998, the Supreme Court held that he could be subject to a civil suit by Paula Jones for conduct that took place before he was in office. The explicit rationale was that the president’s job did not exempt him from the legal process to which all citizens are subject. As in the case of the Watergate tapes, the Court did not decide the question of constitutional removal. But the principle of the rule of law that applies to civil suits should apply with equal or greater force to criminal conduct.

To these legal arguments from principle and precedent may be added an intuitive, moral argument in the form of a reductio ad absurdum: Suppose the president shot someone on Fifth Avenue, a scenario he himself alluded to on the campaign trail. Suppose further that a Republican House did not immediately impeach him, or that the Senate could not reach the two-thirds supermajority needed to remove him from office. Could we continue to believe in the rule of law if the president were able to avoid criminal prosecution as long as he remained in office? Our conclusion should presumably be the same: We could not imagine that the law was not committed before he entered office but revealed only once he was in the White House. The Constitution should not be interpreted to require such a moral outrage.

The strongest argument for exempting a sitting president from criminal prosecution, on the other hand, involves the very specification of presidential government in a democracy. The democratic process selects the president. It would be counter-majoritarian, then, for the president to be effectively blocked from doing his job by any mechanism other than a political one. An unelected prosecutor who brings charges against the president would be superseding the public, according to this view. She would be undertaking a form of regime change outside the accepted norms of governance. If the president were convicted and impeached, it would be impossible for him to do his job.9

For this reason, opponents of presidential indictment tend to emphasize impeachment as the sole constitutionally specified mechanism for presidential removal. The basic idea is that if a president is to be removed, the politically elected branches of Congress should do it, preferably, like the impeachment of Nixon, or by proper congressional interpretation of the Constitution. If the president would or should be impeached and removed, then we could resolve his case in another way.6

Man is the real problem. He might be removed from office in 2017. The strongest argument for exempting a sitting president by requiring impeachment and removal to precede criminal prosecution.

Opponents of presidential indictments use this Nixon, who, before he asked why the Nixon and Clinton precedents should not be read to allow prosecution of a sitting president. Nixon, they say, only had to produce documents under subpoena, an act that did not interfere with his ability to govern. Since the Supreme Court in the Watergate case explicitly balanced the interests of criminal justice against the interests of a functioning executive, they conclude, a similar balancing should protect the president from an indictment that would make it difficult or impossible for him to govern. Similarly, they argue, the civil suit against Bill Clinton was not supposed to interfere with his presidential duties. To the extent that, in practice, Clinton did find himself overwhelmed by the Jones suit and its fallout, this stands as an even stronger argument against extending the Clinton v. Jones precedent to criminal indictment.

The prospect that the president could be indicted by federal prosecutors raises a further structural problem: it would involve the head of the executive branch being charged by executive officials who are supposed to be working for him. It is tricky to conceptualize such an act of self-prosecution. The presidency is described in the Constitution as exercising unified executive power in a single figure. If prosecutors under the command of the executive can charge the executive with a crime, this upsets the constitutional logic of a unitary executive. A president who can be prosecuted by his inferiors, runs the argument, is not truly their superior—and not truly the executive.

How is one to choose between these arguments for and against presidential indictment, both of which follow familiar modes of constitutional reasoning and hence related in some ways? The answer, I want to suggest, has to come from a functional real-world inquiry. We must ask whether a president who is alleged to have committed a crime or crimes would be promptly impeached and removed from office, thereby allowing for criminal prosecution, or whether he might be allowed to remain in office, either by the Supreme Court or by the House of Representatives? I come to this issue and write a new memorandum that attempts to clarify the content of the Constitution. If the president would or should be impeached and removed, then we could resolve his case in another way.6

Unlike the question of presidential impeachment, which would necessarily be resolved by a court, the question of impeachment is ultimately political. Congress alone decides under what circumstances to start impeachment proceedings, and its judgment cannot be questioned in any other tribunal. Thus Congress could choose to impeach and remove the president for conduct occurring before his presidency and unrelated to the crime.

That said, Congress ought to follow the law. It is possible and (in my view) desirable to ask what the Constitution requires or allows when it says that a president can be impeached for “high crimes and misdemeanors.” Writing in these pages last year, Jacob Weisberg and I suggested that, properly understood, the word “high” that modifies the “crimes and misdemeanors” for which a president may be impeached refers to political acts connected to the office of the president. On this basis, we argued that it would not be proper to impeach a president for ordinary crimes that took place before he took office.

6Clinton’s conduct in lying about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky was often framed as unconnected to his office during the period of the investigation and impeachment, but in retrospect, lying under oath while president about a sexual relationship with a White House intern in the White House counsel office—or even in his connection to Clinton’s official role.

off the presidency.

Assuming we were correct, a serious problem would arise if the president were named as an unindicted coconspirator for prepresidential crimes. If Congress believed, in our view correctly, that he should not impeach him, we would be faced with a president who is not subject to any form of sanction for his alleged crimes so long as he stays in office. Morally, this is a repulsive prospect. It seems obviously intolerable that a person known to have committed a felony should among other things supervise the nation’s prosecutions and pardons. Practically, a president who had been named as an unindicted coconspirator would have to govern in the shadow of potential future prosecution. He would be sorely tempted to make appointments and other decisions with an eye toward getting himself off the hook.

To avoid this morally and practically unacceptable situation, two possible answers present themselves. One would be for Congress to ignore the original and logical meaning of “high crimes and misdemeanors” and remove the president for conduct unrelated to office. The other would be for the prosecutors to indict the president rather than simply name him as an unindicted coconspirator.

However legally questionable the former course might be, it could nevertheless occur. If Trump were impeached, pleaded no contest to a felony charge of tax evasion, and resigned. But this may seem more of a problem than it is. The Department of Justice, acting on behalf of the United States v. Richard Nixon, if it became necessary, the Department of Justice, acting on behalf of the United States v. Donald Trump. This gradual, hard-won depoliticization of prosecution takes some of the force out of the objection that a president should only be removed by a political process. In a rule-of-law system, not every decision need be made politically. The decision to prosecute those who break the law in significant ways should be something closer to automatic, and may be made by officials whom we trust to act on the basis of sound professional judgment, not partisanship.

That is why we accept the investigation and prosecution of congressmen, senators, and other elected officials who have committed crimes. Elected by the public, they are effectively removed from office by unelected prosecutors who go after them. Judges, who must be impeached to be removed under the Constitution, have sometimes been indicted and charged with crimes while still in office. Spiro Agnew was indicted, pleaded no contest to a felony charge of tax evasion, and resigned.

It may seem strange to think of the executive branch prosecuting the executive. But in the end, pragmatic reality should outweigh high formalism when it comes to preserving constitutional government. In the matter of the Watergate tapes, the case was United States v. Donald Trump.

—April 26, 2018
The Tree Whisperers
Tim Flannery

The Plant Messiah: Adventures in Search of the World's Rarest Species by Carlos Magdalena
Doubleday, 261 pp., $26.95

Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm by Isabella Tree
London: Picador, 335 pp., £20.00

During the excavation of Herod’s palace at Masada between 1963 and 1965, a pottery jar was unearthed that contained a great many seeds of the Judean date palm, which had been extinct for some eight hundred years. The jar had been buried sometime between 155 BC and 64 AD. In 2005, after spending forty years in the archaeological collections at Bar-Ilan University, one of the seeds were planted at Keturah in southern Israel. Eight weeks later, one sprouted, becoming the oldest seed to have germinated with human assistance and the only living example of this variety of palm. Methuselah, as it has been named, reached a height of nearly ten feet in 2015 and revealed that it was male when it started producing pollen. Similar seeds from other archaeological sites around the Dead Sea have since been coaxied to sprout, but unless a female can be raised to produce flowers for Methuselah to pollinate, would then be viable, and its genetically identical clones would always be vulnerable to disease that could cause its extinction.

When he arrived at Kew, Magdalena was assigned work in a greenhouse where a few café marron cuttings were growing. Attracted by the abundant flowers, he thought that perhaps a way could be found to produce seeds. He felt that the problem was that pollen was not getting to the female part of the flower. So he began cutting into the flowers to open a path for fertilization. Many experts thought this was misguided or hopeless, but after about 180 attempts Magdalena finally managed to fertilize a single flower. Then he had to wait six months for the seed pod to mature. The seeds were sown, but soon after they sprouted, all of the seedlings died. Undeterred, Magdalena kept experimenting. He discovered that if he gave the plants lots of light and heat, more seeds would be set. But even at Kew the precious pods weren’t safe. One morning, when Magdalena went to check his plants, he discovered that a crucial pod-bearing branch had been cut for use in a plant-identification test for students. You can almost hear his shrick of rage rising off the page. But Magdalena is nothing if not persistent, and eventually he raised eight seed pods. The seedlings he grew from them needed protection, so he created a “mini-Rodrigues” at Kew—an island planted to protect it, and when that proved insufficient, another. But even this was not enough, so three branches were cut from the respotted stump and sent to Rodrigues, Magdalena’s native island, in 2007. Eventually he learned that the youth had had problems with substance abuse, and had died without learning about his contribution to saving one of the world’s rarest plants.

The Mascarene Islands group, of which Rodrigues is a part, abounds in endangered species. There remains but a single specimen of the Hyophorbe amaricaulis palm. It grows in the Curepipe Botanic Gardens on Mauritius, where it bears only three to five leaves, and while it occasionally flowers, the male flowers open long before the female ones, so it can only be pollinated with human help. Magdalena has visited this lonely palm several times, but such are the complexities of fertilizing it, then obtaining mature fruit, that he has never succeeded in increasing its number. He has, however, come close. Once, staff at the gardens obtained five seeds. But when Magdalena went to collect them, he found one of the gardener’s labors climbing on them. When the outraged Magdalena questioned him, the man replied, “We like to eat palm seeds. I have never eaten these species before.”

In 1990 the last known example of a Mauritian member of the daisy family, the tree-sized Cylindroclinite lorencii, died, and all that remained of the species were a few almost-dead seeds. Unable to germinate, they were held in a laboratory at the Conservatoire Botanique National du Brest, in France. Nobody knew what to do until researchers discovered that the last three seeds contained a few living cells. These were extracted from the dead tissue and placed in a solution containing all the nutrients plants require to grow. The microscopic clusters of cells began reproducing, and turned into green, wart-like growths, before transforming into plantlets that could be placed in soil. In 2007 Magdalena took twelve of these plants’ descendents to Mauritius to reintroduce them. The species is heat-sensitive, and eleven died as a result of being quarantined in the Mauritius lowlands. Following the closeest brush with extinction imaginable, Cylindroclinite lorencii now at least has a chance of surviving, though it is far from secure.

Lobelia are beautiful flowers much appreciated by gardeners, but there is one species that even the most avid grower would be unable to raise: Lobelia uniflora. The white-flowered form found only on Rodrigues. A few had been growing at Kew, but somehow they were allowed to die out before Magdalena started working there. Luckily, some seeds had been placed in Kew’s seed bank, but when Magdalena went to find them, he discovered that the envelope was empty. He was about to give up when he carefully examined the sticky margin of the envelope flap. A few seeds had stuck there. Separating the precious seeds from the glue, Magdalena was able to grow and propagate the plant.

The work done by Magdalena and others is a reminder that there will be virtually no life in those fields.”

The biodiversity crisis is so profound and widespread that even in Europe, species as well as entire ecosystems are under threat. Among the most alarming losses are those of insects. Members of the Krefeld Entomological Society have been collecting insects in the same way in the same parts of the Or- thoptera—grasshopper, crickets, and cicadas—in northeast west Germany since 1989. By 2013 they had charted a 78 percent drop in insect biomass. The causes of the decline have not been conclusively identified, though the use of pesticides and the intensification of agriculture are among the prime suspects. As one ecologist commented: “We’ve lost huge amounts of habitat, which has certainly contributed. If we travel to Rodrigues, we found a stump. A fence was built to protect it, and when that proved insufficient, another. But even this was not enough, so three branches were cut from the respotted stump and sent to Rodrigues, Magdalena’s native island, in 2007. Eventually he learned that the youth had had problems with substance abuse, and had died without learning about his contribution to saving one of the world’s rarest plants.

Carlos Magdalena at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2014

When the New York Review of Books
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“A kaleidoscope...
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Barry Flanagan, Large Monument, 1996, bronze, 116 1/2 x 52 x 43 1/4 inches, 295.9 x 132.1 x 109.9 cm, Edition of 6 + 2 APs. © The Estate of Barry Flanagan courtesy Plubronze Ltd.
Luftmensch in Paris

Richard Holmes

The Great Nadar: The Man Behind the Camera
by Adam Beattie
Tim Duggan Books, 248 pp., $28.00

When I Was a Photographer
by Félix Nadar; translated from the French by Eduardo Cadava and Liana Theodoratou.
MIT Press, 274 pp., $25.95

At 10:46 PM on December 1, 1865, the American Baltimore Gun Club launched the first successful moonshot from an underground site in Tampa, Florida. The project was a twelve-foot aluminum capsule weighing 19,250 pounds, achieved lunar orbit seventy-two hours later. Among the crew of three was a remarkable Frenchman named Michel Ardan.

A contemporary description has survived of this memorable character. Ardan was over six feet tall, with a “leonine mane” of unlikely red hair, immensely long legs, a “combative” manner, and much “gesticulating” talk. He bubbled with wild ideas and original observations, restless energy, and ceaseless bohemian enthusiasm: “This astonishing man . . . had not yet passed the age of superlatives . . . he saw everything larger than life except difficulties . . . he was a dare-devil . . . an Icarus with a pair of spare wings.” He also had a genius for self-publicity, and by the time of the launch over half a million copies of his photographs were “printed in all formats from life-size to the tiny dimensions of a postage stamp,” had been circulated in newspapers and magazines across the whole American continent.

Of course all this is fiction. It comes from Jules Verne’s early science adventure novel From the Earth to the Moon (1865). But the “astonishing” Ardan was based closely on fact. He is an accurate portrait, both physically and psychologically, and one is tempted to say sociologically, of a real historical figure: Félix Nadar (1820–1910). Nadar in Paris in 1820. The eldest of five children, he already encouraged tall tales and “photography, electricity, and invention. He was born Gaspard-Félix Tournachon in Paris in 1820. The eldest son of a bankrupt printer from Lyons who died in financial chaos, Tournachon was left with a doting mother and a needy younger brother, Adrien. He was expelled from the Collège Bourbon (characteristically for experimenting with nonsafety matches), abandoned medical school, and then flung himself into the Left Bank world of Parisian literary bohemia that was soon to be celebrated in the tender romantic tales of Scènes de la vie de Bohème (1849), by his friend Henri Murger, and eventually in Puccini’s gloriously sentimental opera La Bohème (1885).

With his red hair and anarchic manner he already encouraged tall tales about himself, as he would do for the rest of his life. Begley recounts a story told by his fellow photographer Étienne Carjat, of young Tournachon living in his version of artistic penury: Nadar didn’t stir from his bed for two months, having no clothes to go out in. His mistress had pantaloons and yellow boots she wore to the Opéra Ball. The two of them had a passion for oysters, and the discarded shells carpeted the floor of the room.

For the next twenty years Tournachon lived hand-to-mouth as a small-time journalist, political radical, cartoonist, and would-be novelist. His rambling fiction La Robe de Déjérine (1843), about penniless artists living in a Parisian garret, draws on the same poignant material as Murger but with a boisterous republican slant. His exceptional chutzpah is already suggested by his launching a luxury magazine, Le Livre d’or, with a host of big-name contributors—Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval—in 1839, when he was only nineteen. It folded after three issues.

The following year (although still penniless) he hosted a hugely successful fête champêtre (fancy garden party) off the rue Montmartre, issuing a crazed invitation and promising fireworks, tableaux vivants, anatomy lessons, wild singing, and “decadent women,” most of which turned out to be purely imaginary. But significantly he illustrated the invitation with two clever cartoon figures, a Pierrot and a long-legged poet. He signed it with one of his earliest self-inventions: the strictly fabulous “M. le vicomte de la Tour Nadard” (the “d” was dropped later).

In the 1840s, Nadar’s written journalism (genial but vaguely libellesque) began to be banned by small, startling illustrations. He submitted cartoons and caricatures of Parisian celebrities, mostly writers or politicians. The poet Charles Baudelaire described this early work as “a heap of astonishing bizarre masterpieces—abund, crazy, naive, insolent, charming—that had nothing to do with the art of Raphael and resembled the drawings of a wick- edly smart child.”

They fed a growing fashion for graphic humor in large-circulation magazines, and notably for Caricature and Charivari, edited by the powerful Charles Philipon—“Baron Burlesque”—who first caricatured the doomed French king Louis-Philippe as a large, overripe pear. It is an irreverent tradition that still flourishes in France to this day, recklessly and sometimes heroically pursued, as in the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo.

It was now that the signature “Nadar,” drawn with a long-legged racing letter N, began to proliferate across the press, first in the Journal du dimanche in 1847, then in La Revue Comique, and finally in Philipon’s immensely popular and scurrilous Le Journal pour rire (Journal for a Laugh) in 1849. There had been interruptions. During the revolutionary year 1848 Nadar marched quixotically with his younger brother Adrien in a volunteer army to liberate the French empire. His bohemian days ended with a spell in debtor’s prison, lightheartedly described in “Clichy in 1850” and swiftly followed by the start of regular commissions from Philipon, a professional engagement that would continue for over a decade.

In 1851, his first full year of work for Philipon, Nadar produced over five hundred individual caricatures and a fortuitously lead cartoon filling the whole first page of his front page he was “always busy, always late, always in demand.” The distinguished illustrator Paul Gavarni observed with resignation, “All is lost! See how Nadar has learned to draw!”

Next Nadar came up with the idea for a series of enormous pictorial pan-théons. The first was political, a cortege of sixty delegates of the Constituent Assembly. He had by now developed his trademark manner of showing them as bizarre homunculi with shrunken bodies but large, instantly recognizable heads. They were known as portraits-chargé (“weighted” or “loaded” comic portraits). It is a style not dissimilar to that created by David Levine.

Then came the hugely ambitious Panthéon Nadar, to be financed by various loans. Originally it was to be four vast panoramic lithographs depicting the leading luminaries: “the leading authors, musicians, actors, and artists of the day. But only one lithograph finally appeared, the literary Panthéon Nadar in 1854. It is
a fantastic, snaking celebrity lineup, consisting of 250osting writers led by Victor Hugo. Yet only a mere 136 cop-
ies were sold. As Begley remarks, “the concept was
brilliant but the execution a shambles.” But Nadar had
understood intuitively the emerg-
ing celebrity culture, which he desired to be publicly known, to be visible and recognized now and in the fu-
ture. Long familiar with that crav-
ing in himself, he could spot it with ease in his contemporaries.

The Panthéon Nadar was so expen-
sive and time-consuming that it nearly bankrupted him. But the new tech-
ning of photography had made his name. It also led to his dis-
covery of a new, fashionable, and much swifter image-making process:
photography as biography—becoming the per-
light.” After years of experimentation in the 1840s, it had been released from the tech-
tical straitjacket of the slow daguerreotype, which took several minutes to reproduce a two-dimen-
sion image on glass. The rapid wet-plate process,
using a coating of the chemical collo-
iod, could record a portrait in a matter of seconds and be retained permanently on silver-salt papers.

In 1854 Nadar set up his brother,
Adrien, in a shared photographic stu-
dio at 11 boulevard des Capucines. Their first success was a series of bold white “Pierrot” studies, posed by the famous mime Charles Daurat and shown at the Exposition Universelle of 1855. Adrien always claimed these as his alone, and after a brief and troubled period of collaboration, Nadar moved into his own studio at 113 rue Saint-
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images of Baudelaire, and the theories of intimacy, loss, and “ghostly layers” in photography. In his celebrated but unfinished Arcades Project of 1927, Benjamin also drew attention to the oddity that to give scale and authenticity to his photographs of the Paris catacombs and sewers, Nadar had to introduce ghostlike mannequins into them. Exposure under electric light simply took too long for living models (“Subterranean Paris”). So, paradoxically, to achieve “photographic realism,” Nadar had to introduce fake figures and “theatricality.”

This same contradiction between the authentic and the invented (or the factual and the fictional) runs intriguingly, and sometimes comically, throughout Adam Begley’s irresistible biography. Nadar’s tantalizing personality emerges as a scintillating but provocative combination of both. The theme is cunningly introduced on the very first page, where Begley presents a dashingly posed studio shot—a brilliant Nadar “fake” or fiction.

Begley’s skill in this kind of biographic revelation is well practiced. His first biography was a long, shrewd, meticulously detailed life of John Updike (2014), analyzing all the novelist’s autobiographical tics and devices. He has been a fellow of the Leon Levy Center for Biography and has published a number of penetrating interviews in the famous Paris Review series. But with The Great Nadar, there is also a sense of his breaking free, relishing his Parisian researches, and reveling in a witty, nimble, good-natured narrative. He seems wonderfully at home in the Second Empire, and shifts effortlessly between historical backgrounds, technical explanation, and close-up scenes, brilliantly recreating Nadar at work in his “opulent” and “lavish” photographic studios.

Begley’s gentle fascination with Ernestine Tournachon, Nadar’s faithful, kindly, long-suffering wife (“Madame Bonne,” or “Mrs. Good”), is also exemplary. There are three sets of photos of her, all emotionally revealing. The first, quizical set belongs to 1854, when they were just married; the second, from 1863, shows her posed alongside him in the basket of his balloon with a mixture of admiration and alarm. It is the third, taken in about 1890 after her stroke, that is the most powerful and has made a journey through time quite as long as Michel Ardan’s.

It presents her with monumental simplicity, propped against a pillow, silver-haired and huge-eyed, smelling a sprig of violets. Roland Barthes wrote an entire book, Camera Lucida (1980), that was inspired by this picture, a masterpiece of tenderness that for him demonstrated that Nadar was “the greatest photographer in the world.” Later Nadar and the dying Ernestine also appear touchingly in Julian Barnes’s Levels of Life (2013), his unforgettable meditation on the loss of his own wife.

Begley laments that we will never know Ernestine better. But he produces this masterly reflection on her husband’s whirling celebrity:

For all the noise Félix made over his long lifetime, for all the chatter and the tireless agitation of his several tumultuous careers and many transient enthusiasms, it is the quiet pause, the stillness and silence as he released the camera’s shutter, opened and closed in a heartbeat, that makes an irresistible claim on our attention. Proof of his genius, the portraits are his own ticket to the pantheon of great artists.

SOME JOY FOR MORNING

Now the connection with spring has dissolved.

Now that hysteria is blooming.

Says every day I want to fly my kite.

Says what’s a grammar when you is no longer you.

My world is hydrogen burning in space and in the fullness of etc.

I have read the news and learned nothing.

I try to understand the whooshing overhead.

But for a little light now.

I didn’t realize the tree was weeping.

How was I to know I am not alone.

Wild light.

—Peter Gizzi
Guiding principles for ensuring that central bankers and other unelected policymakers remain stewards of the common good

“A refreshing and important read for scientists and policymakers alike.”
—A. Zee, author of On Gravity: A Brief Tour of a Weighty Subject

“A succinct and comprehensive history of the development of citizenship from the Roman Empire to the present day

“A political history of environmental policy and regulation in California, from the Gold Rush to the present

“The Spectre of Race confronts the dark history of the democracies we defend. This is the book for our times.”
—Robin D. G. Kelley, author of Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination

“A must-read for those who seek to understand the modern South.”
—Anthony J. Badger, author of FDR: The First Hundred Days

“To read The Plural of Us is to sense a lifetime of thinking and feeling brought to bear on some of the most fundamental aspects of lyric poetry.”
—James Longenbach, author of The Virtues of Poetry

“[C. C. Tsai’s] books are awe-inspiring. . . . This is cartooning of the highest order.”
—Larry Gonick, author of The Cartoon History of the Universe

A political history of environmental policy and regulation in California, from the Gold Rush to the present

A succinct and comprehensive history of the development of citizenship from the Roman Empire to the present day
The Mists of Time

Hermione Lee

In 1945 our parents went away and left us in the care of two men who may have been criminals," Warlight begins, with irresistible lacunar oddness. The parents say they are going to Singapore for a year, for the father's job. The mother, Rose, makes much of packing her trunk. Nathaniel and Rachel's real father has been in by her family. This boy, strangely like secretive poker players, is fourteen when the story begins and becomes the immigrant bridge-builder in what sounds very like Dulwich College, the school Ondaatje was sent to, and disliked, in his teens). But his real education is the war, of agents for the Special Operations Executive. He is one of those fear-defying, self-made, adventurous Ondaatje characters who seem capable of anything—like Nicholas Temelcoff the thief in that novel and in Running in the Family. Ondaatje loves crafts and skills—from the story, one of Ondaatje's lost siblings.

Rachel's theatrical world mirrors the theater of the novel. Everyone is onstage: everyone is camouflaged or has a false name. Ruvigny Gardens feels like an amateur theatre company. No one is what he or she seems. Like secretive poker players, they are all breasting their cards, as The Darter teaches Nathaniel to. Gradually, through the secrets and disguises, the story of their mother, Rose, begins to emerge out of her camouflage. It turns out to be her book as much as her son's, and he becomes the indi 20

The New York Review

Warlight
by Michael Ondaatje.

Knopf, 299 pp., $26.95

The narrator of War light, an Englishman named Nathaniel Williams who is fourteen when the story begins and twenty-nine (though sounding much older) when he looks back and tries to piece it all together, tells himself this about the past:

You return to that earlier time armed with the present, and no matter how dark that world was, you do not leave it unlit. You take your adult self with you. It is not to be a reliving, but a rewitnessing.

Dark worlds, blackouts, night scenes, bonfires in unlit streets, the hour before dawn “as night began dissolving,” sodium lamps, points of light, writing by candlelight, and the gray buildings of postwar London pattern this novel of chiaroscuro. Secrets and hidden lives remain obscure for a long time; some mysteries never come to light; some things stay lost in darkness. The narrator is feeling his way back through the half-dark.

As in so much of Michael Ondaatje’s work, adult selves have to re-witness what happened in childhood and work out how and why early experiences have made them who they are. This goes for Anil in Anil’s Ghost, and for the traumatically parted siblings. In Divisadero, and for the narrator, “Michael,” looking back on his eleven-year-old self in The Cat’s Table, and for Ondaatje himself, returning to Sri Lanka and to the family story in Running in the Family, because “in my mid-thirties I realised I had slipped past a childhood I had ignored and not understood.” But how can you know, at the time, how events are going to shape your future life? The question haunts his books, as in Divisadero:

We live with those retrievals from childhood that coalesce and echo throughout our lives…. We live permanently in the recurrence of our own stories.

“What do we eventually become which we are originally meant to be?” asks the bewildered narrator of Warlight. The readers are no wiser than the characters. We’re in the “unlit,” too. There are clues everywhere from the first page, tiny details waiting to have their meaning detonated much later on—a sprig of rosemary placed in a pocket, a line from a Schumann song, a squeaking floorboard, a scribbled map—but we have to piecethem together, as the narrator does, like a jigsaw puzzle or papers in an archive. We share the narrator’s hesitancy and uncertainty, and we have to be patient. In The Cat’s Table, we’re told, with approval, about a filmmaker who doesn’t want his audience to feel wiser than his characters. “We do not have more knowledge than the characters have about themselves.” The effect of that method here is slow, suspenseful, and disquieting.

Unlike those surrogate parents, Nathaniel and Rachel’s real father has vanished forever, as fathers tend to do in Ondaatje’s work. He is an absent ghost, never explained or understood. But their mother is the challenge to them. They find her trunk, so they know she hasn’t really gone away. She is somewhere out there, hidden from them. As in The Cat’s Table, we don’t know whether the boy will find his missing mother.

Nathaniel has a loose attachment to his school, which he dislikes (it sounds like a false name. Ruvigny Gardens feels like a theater of the novel. Everyone is on-stage; everyone is camouflaged or has a false name. Like secretive poker players, they are all breasting their cards, as The Darter teaches Nathaniel to. Gradually, through the secrets and disguises, the story of their mother, Rose, begins to emerge out of her camouflage. It turns out to be her book as much as her son’s, and he becomes the individual of her life.

Rose grew up in a settled English family in remote rural Suffolka—a part of the county called “The Saints” because of its groups of little villages, each with its church, the perfect setting for decoy airfields to confuse the enemy during the war. Her father was an admiral in War World I. At eight, she begins to be a reliving, but a rewitnessing. These are the tensions between the Allies and the Partisans in Italy and Yugoslavia.

Love surrounded by the greyhounds. He calls her Agnes, after one of the waitresses, a girl with a green ribbon in her hair, who takes him to empty houses where they make love. He is nowhere like Nicholas Temelcoff the thief in that novel and in In the Skin of a Lion, or Caravaggio the thief in that novel and in The English Patient, or Coop the farm worker in Twelfth Night. History comes flooding into the novel with the story of Rose and Felon.

Rose’s hidden work is pieced together in later years by her son, who is working in the Foreign Office archives—a rather laborious piece of plotting that enables him to listen in on crucial interrogations and track down people who were involved during the war, Marsh Felon recruited her as an agent. She was a radio operator, intercepting enemy and Partisan signals, harvesting data on enemy maneuvers and broadcasting them over the airwaves, working clandestinely in Europe in the period when she left her children. Her code name is “Viola”: her echo of the heroine Violette Szabo, as well as of Shakespeare’s disguised heroine in Twelfth Night, homeless in a foreign country, and perhaps too an echo of the word “violent.” She and Felon play their part in the tensions between the Allies and the Partisans in Italy and Yugoslavia.
Brutal acts of torture, extermination, revenge, and betrayal are part of this history. There are scenes in Italy in secret agents' camps and interrogation rooms. Looking back from the security of the Foreign Office archive room on the closing stages of the war and the actions of the Partisans, the Fascists, and the Allies. Nathaniel sees “moral positions” are equivocal; there is always conflicting evidence.

Because her children are endangered, Rose severs her links to the intelligence world after the war. But she is a wanted person, and her past catches up with her. As in many of Ondaatje’s novels, war presses in on the private lives of the characters. There is no such thing as a safe house. The words “danger” and “safety” ring uneasily all through the book.

The grown-up Nathaniel works out that the nighttime dog-smuggling had been a cover for the dangerous transportation of nitroglycerin from the wartime munitions factory at Waltham Abbey. The “night zoo” of oddballs in Ruvigny Gardens were guardians sent to keep the children safe. They were all working for the Intelligence Service, part of an intricate world that resembled a “remarkable theatrical performance.” They were always in danger, and one of them gave his life for the children.

Realizing years later, how unknowing, ignorant—or innocent—he was, Nathaniel has to ask himself how dangerous he was to others, how much damage he did unknowingly. His strange rite of passage from childhood to adulthood has to be rethought. He ends up looking back at damage and tragedy from the apparent safety of his “walled garden” in Suffolk, a regretful, sad narrator, like Dowell in Ford Madox Ford’s The Good Soldier, or Tony Webster in Julian Barnes’s The Sense of an Ending, or Maurice Ben drix in Graham Greene’s The End of the Affair.

Those are all English stories, or stories about Englishness, and this is Ondaatje’s English novel. English heroism, eccentricity, irony, shyness, and duplicity, English landscape and history, are the subject of Warlight. There are eloquent, haunting, precise evocations of the atmosphere of London at the end of the war, of the seasonal life of rural Suffolk, and, best of all, of the great tidal river and its traffic. At the end of The Cat’s Table, the boys from Asia arrive in England, where they are going to spend the rest of their childhoods. Their ocean liner rides up the Thames to Tilbury docks, through a scene that seems to them “a remnant from another industrial time—jetties, saltings, the entrances to dredged channels,” a place “full of names.” This becomes the adventure ground of Warlight, the world of barges and lightermen and secret cargo and tideways:

Sometimes we travelled east beyond Woolwich and Barking, and even in the darkness knew our location by just the sound of the river or the pull of the tide. Beyond Barking there was Caspian Wharf, Erith Reach, the Tilbury Cut, Lower Hope Reach, Blyth Sands, the Isle of Grain, the estuary, and then the sea.

As in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness or Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend, this river too is one of the dark places of the earth. Warlight (which is full of literary, musical, and theatrical allusions) is partly an adventure story of danger and discovery. The boy sometimes feels he is in a fairy tale, or an old ballad, or a detective novel, or a thriller. But as his angry, alienated sister will tell him, their story is not a childhood romance: “We were damaged, Nathaniel. Recognize that.” She reminds him of the Schumann song that their guardian, The Moth, used to play to them, with the line: “Mein Herz ist schwer.” Heavy, difficult: that is the reality of life.

There is a question always asked in Ondaatje’s work, and it is asked painfully and anxiously here: Whose story is this? As he puts it in Divisadero, “There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives.” Olive, one of Nathaniel’s guardians, tells him, “Your own story is just one, and perhaps not the important one. The self is not the principal thing.” He learns the lesson from her, and comes to see that “the lives of others...were part of my self-portrait.” As usual in Ondaatje, we are reading a mixture of “partial stories,” out of which the narrator has to construct his life as best he can.

Not all of them come to light. I would like to have heard more of the stories that get erased—of Rachel the fierce sister, of Agnes the young lover with the green ribbon, whom Nathaniel abandons and whose life we only catch up with at the very last, and indirectly. There is some frustration for the reader here—but it is also the narrator’s frustration. There may be occasional moments of frustration, too, with Ondaatje’s plangent, lyrical generalizations about the human condition: “She thinks now that perhaps the truth of what is before you is clear only to those who lack certainty”; “Is this how we discover the truth, evolve?” By gathering together such unconfirmed fragments?” Read with a cold eye, these recurring retrospective musings can sometimes feel schwer—heavy. But it is hard to read Ondaatje with a cold eye. He casts a magical spell, as he takes you into his half-lit world of war and love, death and loss, and the dark waterways of the past.
PoWder Keg in Syria

Steven Simon

The air strike carried out against Syria on April 13 by the United States, Britain, and France—"Operation Desert Stormy" in Bill Maher’s memorable phrase—was carefully pegged to the alleged responsibility of the Assad regime for the chemical attack in Douma on April 7, which killed more than forty people and violated the Chemical Weapons Convention. The strike was explicitly presented as a matter of deterrence, not regime change, and the targets—the Barzah Research and Development Center in the Damascus suburbs and the Him Shishar chemical weapons complex near Homs—borne this out. No presidential palaces were struck, although the countries responsible for the strike were clearly willing to hit Damascus itself. The regime has kept its nerve throughout the civil war, even when the opposition wiped out almost the entire Syrian war cabinet in 2012 with a cleverly placed bomb, and when in the spring of 2015 Palmyra and Jisr al-Shughour fell to rebels who were simultaneously laying siege to western Aleppo. It is scarcely likely to be intimidated by a single strike on this scale. This does not mean that the Trump administration won’t eventually launch another, but for the moment, the status quo will probably prevail.

Under the cover of the raid and the rhetoric that preceded it—Trump labeled Assad a “Gas Killing Animal” who enjoyed murdering his own people and who was weaving their own objectives in Syria. Two days after the atrocity in Douma, the Israeli air force hit a Syrian air base near Homs, killing at least seven Iranian military advisers. Tehran took notice. “Iran is not Syria,” said Ali Shirazi, a Revolutionary Guard Corps official. “If Israel wants to survive for several more days, it needs to stop this children’s play. Iran has the ability to obliterate Israel and when prompted to, [it will be moved] to turn Tel Aviv and Haifa into dust.” Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior aide to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, warned that “Israel’s crime will not remain unanswered.”

Since Donald Trump took office, Israel, the United States, and Iran have been lurching toward war. In Jerusalem and Washington, fear and frustration have been accumulating since 2015, when the Iran nuclear deal was concluded. Because it did not result in the permanent elimination of Iran’s nuclear capability, its critics in the US and Israel rejected it as at best irrelevant. At worst it was seen as abetting Iranian tyranny and aggression (by giving Iran legitimacy as a diplomatic partner) and funding its imperial designs (by suspending sanctions). Having lost the fight against the deal, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and their advocates in Washington turned their attention back to Iran’s conventional threat to the region. Iran, they argued, exercised undue influence in Lebanon, supported Shia rebels in Yemen, subverted Sunni rule over the Shiite majority in Bahrain, supported Shia militias in Iraq, and kept the Assad regime on life support as a host for its parasitic effort to encircle Israel. The Trump administration has linked these security concerns with those that directly bear on Iran’s nuclear program. Iran might be in compliance with the letter of the nuclear agreement, Trump has suggested, but its regional activities demonstrate noncompliance with its spirit—hence Trump’s reluctance to certify Iran’s fulfillment of its part of the agreement. The administration proposed cutting off Iran’s access to Syria using US forces based there, withdrawing from the nuclear deal, reimposing sanctions on Iran, and pushing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iran’s expeditionary force, out of the Middle East. This new approach was greeted ecstatically in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Jerusalem as the triumphant return of the United States to the region after eight years of pathetic restraint. It has also helped reignite the periodically hot cold war between Israel and Iran that began not long after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and has lasted ever since.

Tensions between those two countries spiked on February 10, 2018, when an Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicle, launched from a Syrian air base near Palmyra, crossed into Israeli airspace. The drone was a copy of a US RQ-170 Sentinel that Iran had captured when US controllers in Afghanistan inadvertently let it enter Iranian airspace in 2011. According to Israel, the drone was armed. Although the Syrian government did not comment publicly, one well-connected official privately explained to me that the drone launch was intended to warn Israel that it could no longer treat Syria, which the Israeli air force has struck at least one hundred times since 2011, as a free-fire zone. But Israeli intelligence officials intercepted communications conducted in Farsi by the launch crew, which indicated that Iran was involved. The Israelis believe that the launch crew commander was killed in a subsequent air strike. It is possible that the launch crew was Iranian and that Syrians were giving the orders, but most explanations have tended to put the blame on Iran, whose Foreign Ministry derided the idea of an Iranian drone flying into Israel as “ridiculous.” US and Israeli analysts in the meantime are trying to figure out why Iran, not Israel, was the target of such a provocative action now. The risk of escalation would seem to outweigh the benefit of testing Israel’s capability to detect drones or its response to such intrusions. Some have wondered whether the launch is a sign that Iran lacks full control over its forces in Syria. In any case, the launch seems to have been tacitly sanctioned by Russia, because it is unlikely that the Russian air force had no advance knowledge of it.

The Israelis anticipated the drone and shot it down with a missile from an American F-16 Fighting Falcon approximately ninety seconds after it crossed into Israeli airspace in the southeastern tip of the Galilee, not far from the junction of the Israeli, Jordanian, and Lebanese borders. Israel’s air force then struck the air base from which the drone had been launched and, it claims, destroyed Syria’s main command and control bunker and rendered half of Syria’s air defense infrastructure unusable. Iranian installations were also targeted. Israel lost an F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft to a Syrian antiaircraft missile over Israeli airspace. The loss, the first of an Israeli aircraft to enemy fire in thirty-eight years, appears to have been due to pilot error, which is inexplicably failed to take defensive measures, perhaps because it was too confident.

Israel and Iran both seemed to recognize that the situation was at risk of escalating dangerously. They are said to have communicated their respective intentions to stand down through Russia, which has strong links to both Tehran and Jerusalem and an interest in controlling escalation within Syria. But there are no clearly defined and mutually acknowledged red lines in this conflict. The two sides could clash directly again. This was clearly on the mind of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who insisted that Israel would not just strike Iran’s facilities in Syria but was prepared to take the fight to Iran itself. This was an extraordinary claim, which the clerical regime might not take seriously. But Israel does have the capacity to strike Iranian targets with missiles from submarines patrolling Iran’s coast, long-range aircraft refueled over open ocean or in the airspace of Iran’s Arab adversaries in the Gulf, and the drone that was armed. Although it seems to have been trained to carry out operations inside Iran.

Netanyahu’s warning suggests that he believes Iran intends to establish permanent military bases in Syria, which would constitute a second front against Israel, along with Hezbollah’s presence in Lebanon. For Israel, which is already threatened by as many as 150,000 rockets from Hezbollah, a second armed adversary, on its border with Syria, would be intolerable. The last time a Hezbollah–IRGC unit carried out a reconnaissance operation along the border, in January 2015, Israel wiped it out in an air strike that killed a Revolutionary Guard general and the son of Imad Mughniyah, Hezbollah’s best-known operative. Israel’s current strategy seems to be to walk a fine line between deterrence and provocation. This is difficult to do.

It is hard to say just how likely Iran is to establish a second front in Syria. Autonomous Iranian bases would be relatively easy for Israel to target and difficult for Iran to defend. In light of these risks, Iran might opt instead to...
the resulting agreements gave the US access to bases in Israel, Jordan, Oman, and Kuwait (the latter six countries are part of the Gulf Coopera-
tion Council). But if the experience of the US is any indication, this sort of autochthonous capability is not the norm for Syria. The terms under which the US can use local bases were established by agree-
ments that took decades to negotiate—they simply don’t exist in the Middle East and in 1979 in Oman—and involved delicate compromises. The host coun-
tries wanted a guarantee of security, which Congress was reluctant to con-
fer; they were also concerned about needing the kind of unimpeded access that could complicate the host govern-
ment’s domestic politics.

The resulting agreements gave the US restricted access—for example, the US cannot simply attack other countries from these bases without the explicit permission of the host—and there is no reason to expect that Iran’s access to Syrian facilities would be any more permissive. The Syrian regime is fiercely nationalist; it would likely view a permanent Iranian presence in the country both as an affront to its sovereignty and as a cause of trouble with Israel and the United States. The regime will certainly continue to wel-
come the Iranians and their proxies as long as they are useful. After that, one suspects the welcome will expire.

At the moment, Iran’s presence in southwestern Syria remains relatively small: a few hundred advisers and techni-
cal personnel, and as many as five thousand Shia fighters drawn from Syr-
ian villages and .. In the mainstream media, those statistics have been absurdly exaggerated. The New York Times, quoting Washington-
based pressure groups largely funded by Persian Gulf governments, reported that the number of proxy fighters was “as many as 20,000.” The report was illustrated by a map of western Syria showing how much of it was under Iranian control. Such maps, indicating specific locations where Iranians or their proxies were based—“headquarters, logistical nodes, drone control rooms, training centers.” But none of these entities existed, and “headquarters” could be a half-dozen fighters with a radio, a logistical node could be in a parking lot, a drone con-
trol room could be a ramshackle rifle range and a port-a-potty. The illustrations ac-
companying the story showed only four Syrian province names with arrows indicating the presence of the Iranians, or “Iranians.” This would come as a sur-
prise to the Syrian regime.

The Syrian government concedes that there are five to six thousand of these so-called proxies, who make up the umbrella organisation that runs Iran’s military operations in Syria. The regime denies this, but contends that it needs them because they augment regular Syrian forces dur-
ing especially demanding operations. They are air bases, which were identically named, but the regime says that they will eventu-
ally be moved eastward to join the fight to secure Deir ez-Zour, near the Iraqi border. This claim is at least plausible: it reflects the regime’s need to distribute its available forces.

Israeli officials reject Syria’s justification for the Iranian presence, for two “reasons.” The first is military—Syria’s overall strategy requires a second front against Israel. The clerical regime is implacably opposed to the existence of Israel, but without a shared border to hand over control of his country to Tehran. In 2013, a Syrian official told me that the regime wanted to end the war as quickly as possible, because the sooner it ended, the sooner the Iranians could be shipped back home. Lebanon, he pointed out, had never managed to oust its Iranian proxy fighters, and it is now a shambles. (He did not add that it was Syria that gave Iran access to Leb-
anon, for its own ill-advised reasons.)

The Assad regime is also keenly aware of the risk of war with Israel should Iran become entrenched near the border. As far as he is concerned, the regime is stuck to assert control over southwestern Syria and encourage the redeployment of the United Nations Disengagement Ob-
server Force, which separated Israeli and Syrian troops on the Golan Heights before the civil war broke out in 2011. Assad needs to conserve his military power to retain territory in the east, re-
establish control over Syria’s oil fields, and eventually reconquer Idlib in the northwest. He would compromise his country where we belong, where we want to be.” The National Security Council, the State Department, and the Pentagon were bewildered by what appeared to be a second-front coordinated policy reversal. (The State Department declined to respond to my request for a clarification.) They were not the only ones. Israel’s and the UAE have been counting on the Trump administration to roll back Iranian power in the region, starting with the 2015 nuclear deal. Between two thousand US troops currently deployed to the eastern part of Syria would for-
feit that trust.

Although Israel and the UAE are still far from sharing Iran’s national ambitions, they are far more preoc-
upied by its activities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen. The Saudis and Emiratis believe the US’s incase its support for their calamitous inter-
vention in Yemen, and the Saudis tried to decapitate the Lebanese government or force it to oppose Hezbollah’s influ-
ence. The Saudis and Emiratis have been reluctant to keep Iran out of the Gulf, but their countries have been a fierce critic of the Iranian regime and of US administrations that, in his view, accommodated it. Like many Americans, he sees Iran both as a strategic menace capable of dominat-
ning the Middle East and as a weak and desperate state that the US could eas-
yly overcome. These inconsistent views mean that, in contrast with Trump’s descrip-
tions will have violent outcomes.

It is unclear how the new team will reconcile the desire to thwart Iran in Syria with the president’s urge to disen-
gage. One indication might be Bolton’s idea for an “Arab force” composed of military units from the Gulf Coopera-
tion Council and Egypt, which would replace the US troops in Syria. Setting aside the possibility that Saudi Arabia and the UAE would open fire on Qatari troops rather than on the Syrian side of the border. The Saudis and Emiratis have been counting on a “force” that could replace the US in Syria, the Trump adminis-
 ratio of the need to separate Israeli and Syrian territory. In congressional testimony, David Satterfield, the act-
ing assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, has justified an open-
edended US military presence in Syria partly on the issue of keeping the Assad re-
to Wisconsin. The US has not yet disclosed any strategy for overthrowing Assad’s re-
cause, is isolated in the Syrian re-
time that such a force, isolated in the Syr-
ian desert, would not be an obstacle for the Assad regime. The US troops in Syria. Regardless of how many US troops stay or go, the new administra-
tion’s apparent determination to draw from the US nuclear deal could easily put the United States on a col-
liion course with Iran, especially if US military presence in Syria is seen as a threat to Israeli security. The US could try to im-
pose what it has repeatedly called “cripping” sanctions on Iran, but there is little chance that Iran would be deterred from its nuclear program by the threat of economic penalties. The largest expansion of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure took place under a vast
and intricate regime of sanctions. Between 2006, when nuclear-related UN sanctions were first put in place, and 2013, when the interim deal freezing Iran’s capability was agreed on, the number of centrifuges increased from few, if any, to nearly 20,000. During this period, the UNSC hit Iran with five sanctions resolutions, including an especially punitive one in 2010. Given that Iran was installing about 3,000 centrifuges per year while under intense sanctions, had there never been the agreement, Iran would now have yet another 15,000 centrifuges.

If these precedents are any indication, Iran’s antagonists would be left with just one option: the physical destruction of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. For some, like Bolton and Pompeo, this is a desirable outcome. They believe that an attack on Iran, which would probably involve strikes against targets associated with the regime, such as the Republican Guards, would usher in a new era of American dominance. The Iranian people would presumably welcome the United States as their liberator, repudiate the clerical regime’s regional ambitions, and put aside their nationalist views to accommodate Israel’s existence and seek a rapprochement with the Arab kingdoms to the west.

Here, too, some uncertainty is in order. The Trump administration’s highly confrontational stances on trade and North Korea have softened over time in favor of negotiation; steel and aluminum tariffs on allies have been rolled back; and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin has been cultivating China’s newly appointed trade czar. Though Trump has repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal, it is still possible—in view of his apparent desire, at least for the moment, to avoid complications abroad—that he will simply refuse to certify Iranian compliance, which would leave it to Congress to take further steps.

This is a volatile administration. Even aside from its internal policy differences, it makes haphazard, ill-disciplined decisions that often cause confusion: following the use of chemical weapons at Douma, it simultaneously pushed at the UN for sanctions against Russia and issued a White House declaration rejecting sanctions. In the short term, the chasm that has separated the president from his national security team might narrow. The national security adviser believes he can sway the president’s judgment by catering to his apparent desire to be bellicose and impulsive. The US may still clash with Iran in Syria. Even if it does not, regional allies could use the president’s apparent willingness to follow through on his pledge to “tear up” the nuclear agreement and proceed toward regime change in Tehran. In either of those regions, the world would be likelier to descend into war.

April 24, 2018

Chantal Akerman

A series of forty-five films at the Cinémathèque Française, Paris, January 31–March 2, 2018

In 1990 the Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman set out on a trip across the former Soviet Union to do research for a movie about the poet Anna Akhmatova. She said “it was almost like home, or close enough.” Akerman’s Polish-Jewish parents had both immigrated to Brussels from Eastern Europe some fifty years before. Her mother survived Auschwitz, where her own parents were killed. In her 2013 memoir Ma mère, v. Akerman remembered that in her old age her mother would sometimes announce out of the blue, “without anyone having asked,” that she no longer remembered much Polish. Wherever Akerman went during that first trip, she found “the same food on the table that my mother always made.”

But the movie she shot when she returned to the region in 1992 made no reference to Akhmatova and didn’t mention her family background at all. Filmed in Russia, Poland, and what had just ceased to be East Germany, From the East is elliptical and radiantly cold. It consists entirely of shots, often long, of landscapes, interiors and the people who inhabit them: snowy roads and sidewalks, tenants sitting in living rooms or watching television, middle-aged women cooking, dancers taking to the floor in a gloomy recreation hall, a pianist rehearsing at home, a cellist playing onstage. No one speaks.

Akerman committed suicide in 2015, when she was sixty-five. Since her death, retrospectives of her more than forty films—documentaries, fictions, essay films, musicals, and somber elegies she produced by piecing together New York, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and most recently, Paris, in an exhaustive season at the Cinémathèque Française. Like much of this elusive director’s work, From the East sounds striking in description but plays out in a hypnotic, acting rhythm onscreen. Each shot gets thinly, and let them glow through their unbroken minutes. At the end of her early career Je tu il elle (1974), which she made in her mid-twenties and in which she also starred, she used a static, detached shot to show her character making love with an ex-girlfriend for ten minutes. Her family could be powerful sources of energy for her movies as long as she scattered them widely, covered them up thinly, and let them glow through their concealment.

“I don’t have an idea,” Akerman told Gary Indiana in a 1983 interview. “I have a feeling that I try to express.” But to be expressed in her films, feelings often had to first be chiseled out of the air or left to chill. At the end of her early career feature Je tu il elle (1974), which she made in her mid-twenties and in which she also starred, she used a static, detached shot to show her character making love with an ex-girlfriend for ten unbroken minutes. Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975), the dread-filled masterpiece for which Akerman remains best known, centered on a widowed single mother—her sister lives elsewhere and her parents, we learn, both died in the concentration camps—who picks up sex work on the side to support her teenage son and eventually commits an unexpected act of violence. Much of the film’s two hundred minutes, however, show her doing such domestic jobs as peeling potatoes and kneading veil in tense long takes that leave us looking for mistakes and glitches in her immaculate routines. By the age of twenty-four, Akerman had arrived at a style at once taut and permissive, rebellious and disciplined, candid and cool.

A kerman never put much trust in biographical readings of her work. The cover of Corinne Rondeau’s brief, ruminative Chantal Akerman: Passer la Nuit (2017), the first such study to appear since the filmmaker’s death, carries a quote from a 2014 interview: “I don’t think one should look around in autobiography; that seals things off.” In 1976 Akerman cautioned another interviewer against reading too much into Les Rendez-vous d’Anna (1978), despite the fact that, as Rondeau points out, the film centered on “a filmmaker, a single woman, a Jew, a postwar European transplant, a troubled rapport between a mother and a daughter.” Its most affecting scene shows the adult heroine lying in bed beside her mother, coming out to the older woman for the first time. Still, Akerman insisted, none of the film had come from her lived experience, “except that I travelled.”

She was born in 1950 and was still a teenager when, in 1968, she made her first short, Saute ma ville. She paid for the shoestring budget by going to the Antwerp Diamond Bourse and selling shares in the film itself for $3 each. The movie was a slapstick performance—she compared it to hospital food—she turned on to shoot a suicide fantasy: she played a young woman who tears apart her family kitchen, seals the door, sets a newspaper on fire, and turns on the gas. She spent the following winter living in freezing, unheated maid’s quarters in Paris, and then with a Laozi scholar she remembered, “through DROR, the Zionist-Socialist Jewish movement.” After they parted ways, she said, “he committed suicide, and I learned about it while I was waiting in line to see a film.”

Her time in New York, where she spent her twenty-first birthday, produced a pair of magnificent collaborations—Hotel Monterey and the short La Chambre—with the cinematographer Babette Mangolte, who would go on to shoot Jeune Jeune Jeune (A third film, called Hanging Out Yonkers, about “young junkies in rehab centers outside New York,” went astray on loan and never resurfaced in full. “It was really beautiful,” Akerman said.) She worked a series of odd jobs: between 1971 and 1973 she was a restaurant cook, a sculptor’s model, a thrift store clerk, a photo technician, and a cashier at a porn theater, from which she later admitted she stole $4,000 in less than a month.

When she wasn’t at a day job or making films, she seems to have been at Anthology Film Archives absorbing the experimental productions of Yvonne Rainer, Jonas Mekas, and Michael Snow. Those films would be a formative influence on the string of masterworks she went on to make during the rest of the decade, all while still in her twenties: Jeanne Dielman, Je tu il elle, 1974
elle, News from Home (1976), and Les Rendez-vous d’Anna. In these movies Akerman arrived at a tone—chocked, hushed, achingly lonely—that let her commit wholeheartedly to characters who made their lives in exile and passed between lovers, across borders, or into personal crises. She would stay preoccupied with such figures but broaden her range in the films she made from then on: her numerous comedies and musicals, including The Eighties (1983) and Golden Eighties (1986), A Couch in New York (1996), and Tomorrow We Move (2004); her documentaries about Eastern European Jewish transplants in France and New York; her portraits of dancers and musicians; her intimate essay-films.

The world her movies evoke is one of hotels and apartments through which people come and go; long drives and trips by train; calls home from abroad by phone and, in her last film, No Home Movie (2015), Skype. She was drawn to settings like the shabby New York motel whose nooks and crannies she explored in Hotel Monterey, or the more posh venues through which the nomadic filmmaker at the center of Les Rendez-vous d’Anna passes during her months on the road. In Toute une nuit (1982), dozens of couples whose names we never learn fall in and out of one another’s company over the course of a single night in Brussels.

The people in Akerman’s films move awkwardly and lose track of the space they take up. In Je tu il elle, her own character takes a Buster Keaton–like pratfall across the threshold of her ex’s apartment. Two reunited former lovers—a married Holocaust survivor and the American who took care of her after the war—get forced apart by a crowd of shopping mall customers amid the antic choreography of Golden Eighties; in From the East, a hall fills up with ungainly dancers to a kitschy live band. “I can’t have actresses playing my clumsiness,” Akerman said in a 2011 interview about why she appeared in Je tu il elle herself. “It seems impossible for me to be in a restaurant without knocking something over: my gestures are too large, or I’m pursuing my thoughts and get startled.” Behind the camera, on the other hand, she was never less than precise.

Whatever story she was filming, Akerman always let it develop from a distance. For some—including many of her admirers—it seemed that her lengthy, often static shots were meant to be grueling or tedious to watch. Eric de Kuyper, the semiologist who cowrote Je tu il elle and two of Akerman’s later films, once praised her movies for the “slow and diffuse boredom” he thought they induced. Her early films in particular succeed in part because they test our patience and make us weather their long takes of, for instance, the cleaning of a tub or the making of a roast. “Never before was the materiality of women’s time in the home rendered so viscerally,” the scholar B. Ruby Rich wrote about Jeanne Dielman in 1983, when it finally had a theatrical run in New York. Its tempo, she said, was one “of endless time, repetitively restoring itself.” Bracing for long scenes of endless time, repetitively restoring itself. “What’s News” VK.COM/WSNWS

May 24, 2018

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of one of her parents’ friends. (“You would have had such beautiful children,” the elder woman chastens her when they have a run-in at a train station.) Akerman herself, who had married a man who had that inadequate, unseen man; her most satisfying relationship, she tells her mother, is the one she has recently under- taken with Sarah, who is named Charlotte. (In the phone message that remains the character’s only appearance in the movie) by Akerman herself. But once she di- verts away from the conversation that she has in mind for her, the movie insists that she has forgiven a comfort she can never replace. Her melancholy independence becomes the price she had no choice but to pay for leaving home. Akerman tended to deny her char- acters stable romantic arrangements. What she gave them instead were close friendships, other women, which become the nearest things they have to emotional lives. Characters like the two friends in J’ai faim, j’ai froid might daily with men (one loses her virginity to their older male host while the other hovers in their kitchen), but they move with one another in a space where men can’t follow them. “I’m burning to know what goes on between women that doesn’t between a woman and a man,” the obsessive young man in La Captive asks two of his girlfriend’s fe- male friends when he suspects her of having an affair with another woman. Each of his subsequent questions prompts a cutaway to the two women sitting together, discussing his unan- swerable queries between themselves as if he’s no longer there.

The tone Akerman often found in her fiction films from the 1980s onward was a kind of grim drollery. While her earlier films had sustained a note of majes- tic melancholy, her later ones swerved through. But others about Jewish iden- tity soon followed, especially as Ak- erman started devoting more energy to documentaries. Dis-moi, an extraor- dinary forty-five-minute-long TV movie from 1980, collects her candid inter- views with female Holocaust survivors old enough to be her grandmother. The money for that film never came through. But others about Jewish identi- ty soon followed, especially as Ak- erman started devoting more energy to documentaries. Dis-moi, an extraor- dinary forty-five-minute-long TV movie from 1980, collects her candid inter- views with female Holocaust survivors old enough to be her grandmother.

“You should have children,” the first tells Akerman when she admits she doesn’t have any. “It’s very nice when you have children. On the other hand, it’s sad when you don’t. You feel alone.” Childlessness in these films becomes a sign of exile, a mark of having left the family fold. “My own story is full of missing links,” Akerman reflects over nocturnal footage of the Manhat- tan waterfront at the start of Histoires d’Amérique (1989), having just recited a parable about the virtues of telling stories to one’s children. “And I do not even have a child.” The movie is one of her strangest: an assemblage of Borscht Belt jokes, absurdist folktales, and harrowing stories of immigrant life, recited in stagey, formal English and harrowing stories of immigrant life, recited in stagey, formal English. She took inspiration from Singer and Kafka. “I feel very close to him for his ability to fuse humor and Kafka. “I feel very close to him for his ability to fuse humor and

No Home Movie. The book itself is a performance of the tension between Akerman’s private priorities and what she considered her duties as a daughter. Vignettes about her depression, her breakup with a provocative guest of mind, are titled “C,” her and her movements between Paris and Harlem (she taught film for some years at CUNY) are interwoven with an agon- izing, detailed account of her mother’s declining health. In Mexico, where Na- talia flies for her granddaughter’s wed- ding, a pulmonary embolism sends her to the hospital. Her doctors warn that America should not have made her limits her mobility. Akerman marvels at how quickly she seems to have aged. These observations are collected in a number of video installations in the third generation, her last works, she kept carrying that style to the frayed edges of what words and images could do. She made a number of video installations in the last decades of her life, and her later films bear the influence of these ephemeral images. They plunge us into turbulent, threatening en- vironments. For wordless scenes in her Conrad adaptation Almayer’s Folly (2010), the camera navigates down riv- ers, through storms, and over tempestu- rial storms. No Home Movie repeatedly returns to images of desert landscapes hurting past a car window to the sound of American accents. Akerman’s installation NOW (2015), cur- rently on view at the Jewish Museum in New York, where similar footage plays out against a jangly, makeshift soundtrack on five different hovering screens.

“When the films are finished it’s as if I made nothing but mist.” Akerman wrote in Ma mère rit. For much of her career, Akerman was a renowned—respected, debated, inter- viewed. She hardly recognized herself in what was said about her. “When one gets a reputation about one’s work, one’s first and last name I knew that they were talking about a person who for them had made more than just something like an oeuvre. I didn’t want to comment on them,” she wrote. “So I said nothing.”

The words with which it begins—“I...” were talking about a person who for them had made more than just something like an oeuvre. I didn’t want to comment on them,” she wrote. “So I said nothing.”

The New York Review
The Children Strike Back

Robert O. Paxton

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The documentation that the Klarsfelds gathered with exemplary care and accuracy for these trials also served to commemorate the victims. In 1978 Serge Klarsfeld published *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France*, a mammoth register of every Jew deported from France—over 76,000 names, each one with birthplace, age, and nationality, organized by deportation convoy.¹ The French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch noted that the *Mémorial* restored individual identities to people whom the Nazis had tried to reduce to numbers. A companion volume commemorated all the Jewish children deported from France to their deaths and included photographs of a remarkably high percentage of them.² A further book recounted the arrest and deportation, ordered by Klaus Barbie in April 1944, of forty-four young inmates of an orphanage at Izieu ( Ain ).³ This was the principal crime for which Barbie was tried in 1987, since he could not be tried again on charges for which he had already been condemned to death in absentia twice by French courts, in 1947 and 1954. Serge Klarsfeld's dozen or so publica-
tions also include a succession of histo-
ries of the murder of the Jews of France, packed with original documents, start-
ing in 1983 with *Vichy-Auschwitz* and culminating in 2001 with a monumen-
tal four-volume synthesis, *La Shoah en France.*⁴ The joint memoir *Hunting the Truth*, in which Beate and Serge speak in alternating chapters, helps us understand how these two otherwise ordinary individuals—a nonobservant Jewish Frenchman and a gentle Ger-
man woman—came to devote them-
selves with such single-minded daring to the cause of achieving both justice and commemoration for the French victims of the Holocaust.

Serge Klarsfeld was marked forever at the age of eight by an excruciat-
ing drama in Nice during the night of September 30–October 1, 1943. Hid-

den behind the partition with his mother and sister, he heard his father con-


¹The latest edition, this time in alpha-
"metrical order, is *Mémorial de la dé-


group in 1970s Germany and the empty vengeance of assassination, the Klarsfelds sought to be ‘psychologically violent’. They believed that mounting a forbidden demonstration and going to jail for it while war criminals went free called attention to their message. Unsurprisingly Serge gives particular attention to those he wishes to see prosecuted. For example, he makes René Bousquet personally responsible for the Vichy government’s agreement on July 16, 1942, to assist German efforts to deport foreign Jews, even from the Unoccupied Zone—a decision of such importance that it is difficult to imagine anyone making it other than Bousquet himself. Prime Minister Calmette and Interior Minister Pierre Laval.

Another feature of Serge Klarsfeld’s historiography is his reluctance to condemn the French public (upon whose support his strategy has depended). He attributes the survival of 75 percent of the Jewish population of France (a higher proportion than in any other Nazi-occupied country in Europe except Denmark and Italy) to ‘“pressure put on Vichy by the Church and the French people.” The negative reaction of many French people to the deportations of Jews in 1942, especially to the mass arrests and separation of families by French police in the Unoccupied Zone on August 26–28, is well documented. So are the public protests of several (though far from all) bishops. Laval cited these pressures on September 2, 1942, when he asked the German authorities to stop giving him quotas to fill because he could not deliver Jews indefinitely “as in a five-and-dime store.”

But Klarsfeld’s sanguine view of French public opinion overlooks the willingness of many other French people to buy “aryanized” property, to serve in the Milice and the special anti-Jewish police force, to inform the police about Jewish families on the run, and to turn in hidden Jews for cash. He has always focused much more narrowly on the Nazi-ordered deportations that began in the spring of 1942, and Vichy’s complicity in them, than on Vichy’s own autonomous anti-Jewish measures between 1940 and 1942. The couple did, however, picket the funeral of Xavier Vallat, the first Vichy commissioner for Jewish affairs in 1941–1942, who personified the regime’s Semitic program.

The Klarsfelds also believe firmly in the “distinction between the guilty Germans and the others.” Serge remembers that even during the war his mother was exceptional in her refusal to judge all Germans, and was upset by the bombing of German cities. In the Cologne trial of Lischka, Hagen, and Heinrichson, Serge affirmed that “the Jews of France have never lost confidence in the German judicial system.”

The Klarsfelds’ success has been understood in various shock terms, by public acceptance and hastened legal action. They put a number of unproved war criminals behind bars, and they commemorated by name every version of Jewish adults and children deported from France. They also played a major part in establishing a national day in France to commemorate the most notorious roundup of Jews in Paris, at the Vélodrome d’Hiver, an indoor bicycle racetrack, on July 16, 1942. Successive French presidents, starting with Jacques Chirac in 1995, have spoken there on that date, and the Klarsfelds may well have understated their influence on the president’s words. It is hard to escape the traces of their work in Paris, where every school bears a plaque commemorating the Jewish children deported from France between 1942 and 1944 (many of them French citizens).

The Klarsfelds’ strategy of creating scandals in order to force the legal system to act might not have been equally effective under different conditions, however. A sufficient proportion of the population had to react with more sympathy than the Klarsfelds calculated infractions. A sense of limits helped their strategy. Getting several indubitable war criminals incarcerated and commemorating the dead did not threaten most German or French people. The Klarsfelds did not propose property adjustments, as a settlement with Palestinians or American Indians might involve. They accepted support from both East and West without offering political allegiance to either side and while criticizing both. The restitution of artworks did not concern them. And they were satisfied with modest pensions, from both the German and French governments, for the orphans of those killed in the Holocaust. The Klarsfelds have not limited their militancy to Jewish victims. They have campaigned against other examples of discrimination and violence, defending Roma in Germany, Bosnians, and the “disappeared” of Argentina. They refer only twice, however, to the “Palestinian tragedy” (the term in the original French is the somewhat mawkish “dremanische paalestijnsen”). The Palestinian issue arises when the Klarsfelds encounter some initially sympathetic intellectuals in Damascus, and it opens an “unbridgeable chasm.” In 1974, protesting the refusal of Arab states to recognize the State of Israel at an Arab summit in Rabat, Beate declared that “in the Palestine of the Yishuv, Declaration, there is a place for the Israeli state and for a Palestinian state.” The Klarsfelds are honorary Israeli citizens and the recipients of Israeli support (they thank Menachem Begin in particular). For Serge, the events of 1942 could not have occurred if an Israeli state had existed.

Serge is convinced that anti-Semitism is growing in France today. There are veritably more anti-Jewish incidents than a generation ago, and since the notorious parade in Paris of January 26, 2014, with its cries of “Jews, you will not have France,” one can no longer suppose that these are limited to Muslim immigrants. But the Klarsfelds’ assertion that the present resembles the 1930s is debatable—no prominent intellectual or mainstream newspaper now publicly exposes the view that the presence of Jews is in itself harmful to France. Many of them, indeed, criticize the current prime minister and government of Israel, but the Klarsfelds err in equating the policies with the fundamentally different
April 1992: buildings burned, stores were looted, people were killed. An all-white jury in a suburb of LA had just acquitted four white police officers who had been captured on a camcorder brutally beating Rodney King, a black motorist, the year before. When the verdict was announced, no one could believe it. What ensued, depending on whom you talked to, was “a riot,” a “social explosion,” “a revolution.” Some politicians and academics, waiting to see how the dust settled, chose to call it “the events in LA.” People stood on rooftops watching the fire and smoke, terrified for their property or lives, estimating how long it would take for the violence to get to them. But the destruction stayed pretty much in South Central and areas immediately surrounding it—Koreatown and the lower Wilshire area. It never got to the shops in Beverly Hills. The cry and anthem in the street was “No Justice—No Peace!”

After the news crews packed up their gear, I slipped into LA and moved around the city and its surrounding areas, gathering stories: Simi Valley, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Koreatown, and the epicenter of the riot, South Central. In South Central I talked with many people, including a former member of the Black Panther Party, who was among those who feshed out the background to what had happened. He had the demeanor of a wise man with his graying dreadlocks, and he spoke about the war between black and brown men and the Los Angeles Police Department, which he knew well from when he was in the BPP during the 1970s. He saw the impact that the LA riots and the incidents that had led up to them what “All Power to the People” had been to the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party. I asked, “Hey, has ‘No Justice—No Peace’ taken the place of ‘All Power to the People’?”

After pondering for several seconds, he burst out, “Oh no! Ain’t nothin’ ever gonna be as powerful as ‘All Power to the People!’” If memory serves, I believe we finished the moment off with a rejuvenating high five and our black power fists shooting up in the air.

At the end of the 1960s and 1970s, some (but hardly enough) power got shared. Yes, blacks could sit at lunch counters and shop in department stores, but whom did that benefit? The business owners and the bankers. The color of the owners and bankers did not change enough to make it notable. There was a black and white social hierarchy, but there was no way changed who ran the movie studios. That is still the case today.

We moved from a desire for power to a desire for justice. “No Justice—No Peace!” sprang to the dimmy many minds in the face of a legal system that protects power at the expense of justice. The slogan has been with us for more than twenty-five years, and it has brought us up to this moment. It is still chanted every time a police officer kills or shoots someone who appears to have been denied due process.

The megahit film Black Panther, released fifty years after the cultural rebellions of the 1960s, has elicited much praise. The loudest praise concerns the bottom line. It is among the ten highest-grossing films ever made. Many of its black fans praise the fact that the director, Ryan Coogler, is black and that the cast and creative team are almost entirely black. It has been difficult to get such a movie made. Coogler did it. It is only right that these fine artists were able to grab an opportunity and succeed gloriously. The movie’s financial success is a kind of claim on power. Will “No Justice—No Peace” be replaced by “Wakanda Forever”?

“Black Panther” is a superhero from the Marvel Comic Universe, T’Challa, the Black Panther (played by Chadwick Boseman), who is also a king. After the sudden death of his father, T’Chaka, T’Challa has inherited the throne of the Kingdom of Wakanda, a country in Africa and a utopia in the tradition of El Dorado and Shangri-La. Unmarked by the evils of colonialism, Wakanda is beautiful. It is also wealthy because it has a very valuable metal—vibrarium.

Wakanda has survived by largely cutting itself off from the world, but this strategy is questioned in the course of the film. Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan), the cousin that King T’Challa did not know he had, shows up and disrupts utopia. He seeks to take the throne, change the values upon which Wakanda is based, and change its position in the world. In battle, he pushes T’Challa off a high cliff to his death, and that appears to be that.

Killmonger is competitive; he behaves with no decorum. He has some of the same traits as President Trump. As questionable and distressing as his behavior is to some, once he has the throne, Killmonger gains the support of many in Wakanda, including the head of the fabulous, powerful all-female security guard, Okoye (Danai Gurira). In a way that people will have to see for themselves, the throne is restored in the end to T’Challa, who did not die after all.

The Black Panther character has a long, rich history. Seeing an opportunity to bring a black superhero into the almost entirely white comic book world, Jack Kirby, a Jewish artist, introduced the Black Panther into the world of the Fantastic Four in 1966. Stan Lee, the former publisher and chairman of Marvel, who had a cameo in the movie, was co-creator. The Black Panther comic book character predated the Black Panther Party by a few months. Not wanting to carry the baggage of the controversial BPP, Marvel at one point changed the character’s name to the Black Leopard, but the original name prevailed.

The movie’s financial success has been amazing. Christopher Priest in the late 1990s and early 2000s and Reginald Hudlin in the mid-2000s, both African-American, wrote comics in the series. They are said to have given the character a more Africa-centered, self-determining ethos. Most recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates, following the extraordinary success of his Between the World and Me (2015), was approached by Marvel to write a Black Panther series with the illustrator Brian Stelfreeze, and another chapter in the life of the superhero was born.

The principal artists in the film had not worked on any production of this scale before. Coogler and his core team—Michael B. Jordan, the cinematographer Rachel Morrison, the composer Ludwig Göransson, and the production designer Hannah Beachler—had worked together since Fruitvale Station (2013). To that team, Coogler added the costume designer Ruth Carter, who had worked on large productions before. Spike Lee’s Malcolm X (1992) among them. Some of the actors are not only veterans, they are movie royalty, for example Angela Bassett and Forest Whitaker, and from South Africa, John Kani. Others are among the best of their generation: Lupita Nyong’o, Boseman, Gurira, Daniel Kaluuya, Sterling K. Brown.

The newcomer Letitia Wright, who plays T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, is fresh-faced in every way. Early in the film, her brother is required to so- lidify himself to her in order to bring him into the action. The relative newcomer Letitia Wright, who plays T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, is fresh-faced in every way. Early in the film, her brother is required to solidify himself to her in order to bring him into the action. The relative newcomer Letitia Wright, who plays T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, is fresh-faced in every way. Early in the film, her brother is required to solidify himself to her in order to bring him into the action. The relative newcomer Letitia Wright, who plays T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, is fresh-faced in every way. Early in the film, her brother is required to solidify himself to her in order to bring him into the action. The relative newcomer Letitia Wright, who plays T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, is fresh-faced in every way. Early in the film, her brother is required to solidify himself to her in order to bring him into the action.
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The court of Bobov (as such communities are known) is not the only visible and confident Hasidic group in the US. Today the Hasidic world consists of thriving communities such as Satmar, a Hungarian branch named after its town of origin. In the midst of secular and insular Hasidic group; and the Lubavitch movement, a Russian branch of Hasidism known as Chabad, which, in contrast to Satmar’s isolationism, practices broad and messianic outreach all over the US and the world. As the authors of Hasidism: A New History perceptively point out, one of the ironic aspects of Hasidism’s astonishing resilience is that its postwar resurrection took place in the US and the State of Israel. Hasidic leaders in the early twentieth century sharply opposed the immigration of Jews to Palestine under the banner of Zionism, which they considered a revolt against God’s plan. Jews, in their thinking, had to passively accept the yoke of exile until their return to Zion was divinely sanctioned. In its bitter polemical struggle with Zionism, the Hasidic leadership perceived modern Jewish nationalism as a secularizing movement offering an alternative national Jewish identity that would undermine loyalty to a traditional way of life.

The Hasidic leadership also opposed the mass migration of Jews to the US in the early twentieth century. From their vantage point within the established enclaves in Eastern Europe, they feared that it would acculturate Jewish migrants to corrosive and sinful modern life. Tragically, that opposition trapped many of their followers in Eastern Europe, leading to their eventual death in Nazi concentration camps. (After World War II the surviving Hasidic leaders never reckoned seriously with their colossal and immensely costly failure to grasp the ominous direction of European history before the war; especially when it concerned rabbis who had claimed to have a divinely inspired understanding of reality.) Nowadays, with the protection and support spiritual and communal resources that it nourished from its beginnings.

Hasidism: A New History, written by eight scholars, covers the Hasidic movement from its origin in the second half of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is a monumental scholarly achievement and a great contribution to the understanding of one of the most important movements in Jewish life in the modern period. The book explores all aspects of Hasidism: social, institutional, cultural, demographic, and geographic. It tells the story of its founding member and leader, while also providing a full historical account of the lives of ordinary Hasids, and the gender roles and organization of their families.

A reader who plunges into this book might feel initially overwhelmed by its almost encyclopedic detail about the regions, courts, and dynasties of the Hasidic movement, their locations, and their minute variations and splinters. Nevertheless, the volume is firmly organized around the historical arc of Hasidism’s development: it emerged as a small circle of elites in the second half of the eighteenth century in the territories of Podolia in southeastern Ukraine, spread at the beginning of the nineteenth century to Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland, while gradually developing as a fully formed movement; achieved its golden age in the middle of the nineteenth century by gaining acolytes from Polish Jewry and reaching as far as Hungary and Romania, among other places; began to decline in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as it lost many followers to secular movements such as Zionism and socialism, and subsequently received what seemed to be a final death blow during the Holocaust; and lastly, unpredictably reemerged with vigor in the completely new world of the US and Israel. These developments, which are fully and meticulously explored in the volume, constitute an enormous amount of detail with unity and direction.

Israel ben Eliezer Ba’al Shem Tov (the Besht), the figure retrospectively seen as the founding father of the Hasidic movement, was born around 1699 in the Carpathian mountains of what is today Romania. He didn’t belong to the scholarly Talmudic elite or hold a rabbinic title; he was a healer who used kabbalistic amulets and shamanic techniques. His therapeutic practices involved prescribing amulets with divine names, earning him the title “Ba’al Shem Tov,” literally “a possessor of good (divine) name.” Due to his reputation, he settled in the town of Mezhbizh (in the Ukrainian province of Podolia) as its resident “Kabbalist,” or paid healer. He was at the center of a small circle, one among many that were consecrated to cultivating religious piety and devotion.

What is known about the Besht is largely gleaned from teachings that were passed down orally and then recorded mainly by two of his disciples, Dov Ber of Mezritch and Ya’akov Yosef of Polonnoye, whose hagiographic literature that flourished a generation after his death. The portrait that emerges of the Besht from his students is of a figure endowed with immense charisma and genius. As the authors of Hasidism observe, he was not the conscious founder of a movement, but nevertheless he had an acute sense of a transformative religious calling that defined his life. Following his death in 1760, the Besht’s teachings shaped a bold religious sensibility that served as a foundation for spiritual and communal awakening endowed with sweeping energy and momentum.

Four elements were at the center of the Hasidic sensibility. These elements were given different meanings and permutations in subsequent developments, and the weight of each of them differs from one Hasidic court and school to another, but they define what could loosely be considered the core of the Hasidic phenomenon.

The first foundational element affirmed divine immanence in all dimensions and aspects of reality—in human actions and thoughts, in material
The history of normative moods is delicate and difficult to capture and record. But such transformations engulf the totality of human experience, and when they occur they might cut deeper than changes that happen in other realms, such as doctrine, practice, or communal organization. In the case of Hasidism, the shift toward joy had an impact on the most elemental layers of the religious experience; it cultivated a new Jewish type of personality.

The second fundamental element of the emerging Hasidic sensibility, intimately attached to the element of divine immanence, was the call for worshipping in the material world (avoda be-gashmiyut). This idea enlarged the sphere of religious meanings to include mundane secular activities as well as rituals and properly ordained religious laws. The line between the sacred and the profane was blurred; every activity performed with the proper consciousness can become a meaningful religious encounter.

In prayer, for example, a person might find that his thoughts are wandering very far from the appropriate devotional intention. He can be seized by what were termed “alien thoughts” (mashchavot zarot), which denote erotic fantasies, a possibility that even the most devout cannot fully escape. Such unsettling states of mind may be the natural and necessary response to the spread of technology and instrumental reason. Hasidism presented an openness to revelation while encouraging what seemed to be the most mundane matters; for Buber and others Hasidism put at its center a continuous quest for worship in the material world—can be perceived as constituting a mode of this-worldly mysticism, an affirmation of the here and now. This sensitivity appealed to neo-Hasidic thinkers such as Martin Buber, who saw in it a path to reenchancing the world in opposition to the spread of technology and instrumental reason. Hasidism presented an openness to revelation while encouraging what seemed to be the most mundane matters; for Buber and others Hasidism put at its center a continuous possibility for wonder.

The third fundamental element at the core of Hasidic teaching—God’s immanence and worship in the material world—can be envisioned as a mode of this-worldly mysticism, an affirmation of the here and now. This sensitivity appealed to neo-Hasidic thinkers such as Martin Buber, who saw in it a path to reenchancing the world in opposition to the spread of technology and instrumental reason. Hasidism presented an openness to revelation while encouraging what seemed to be the most mundane matters; for Buber and others Hasidism put at its center a continuous possibility for wonder.
Mitnaged, in contrast to the joyful, religiously ecstatic, and warm Hasid; one puts at the center of his worship the study of Torah and meticulous observation of the law while the other embraces prayer and religious intimacy as his core mode of devotion. Like all stereotypes this general division does great injustice to the rich and diversify of the two approaches, but it captures something about self-perceptions and communal consciousness that developed as a result of the struggle between Mitnagdim and Hasidim.

The authors of Hasidism make an important attempt to put this struggle into perspective. Hasidism, they claim, wasn’t a sect and had much in common with its opponents. It didn’t deviate from Jewish law, and many of its religious doctrines had precedents in prior generations of Hasidic teachers changing any legal ritual practice, the first generations of Hasidic teachers and communal consciousness that de-developed in the teaching of the Besht and his early students, was developed by the third generation of Hasidic teachers and became the most defining feature of Hasidism. The Besht was mythologized as a living channel of God’s bliss to the world. In certain Hasidic communities no meaningful decision—be it marriage or a commercial venture—is made without his blessing, approval, and advice. The role of the rebbe, who galvanized and cemented the loyalty of his followers, shaped among other things the hierarchy and rituals of the court. This new mode of communal organization, unprecedented in the Jewish world, is thoroughly analyzed in Hasidism.

The troublesome nature of this feature of Hasidism was aggravated by the prevalent view that the rebbe’s intimacy with God is passed on to his descendants. The dynastic structure of Hasidism has been burdened with power struggles among heirs, resulting in splinters and divisions. The Bobov community in Brooklyn today is divided between different family members of its first leader in New York, Shlomo Halberstam; a special rabbinic court has decided that only one of them can use the brand of Bobov. (The other group had to settle with the name “Bobov45,” as its synagogue is on 45th Street.) And the Satmar community is engulfed in a bitter struggle between two heirs who had to be separated into different zones of influence, one in Williamsburg and the other in Kiryas Joel, in upstate New York.

Since its inception Hasidism has generated a creative and imaginative body of texts, ideas, and practices. It has given rise to some of the most profound and sometimes exotic thinkers in the history of Jewish thought, persisting into the middle and second half of the nineteenth century with figures such as Mordecai Alter, the leader of the Bobov and Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin. With the expansion of modern secular movements in Central and Eastern Europe, Hasidism adopted a deeply conservative posture in its attempt to safeguard its followers from their corrosive impact and to secure its own continuity. The movement closed its ranks and managed to survive the horrors and cultural travails of the twentieth century. Yet this impressive success had its cost. Fear of diminishing loyalty has constricted its inner creative resources. In today’s Hasidism the rebbe is dominant, but other aspects of the movement have mostly receded to the margins. Its successful strategy of combating outside influences might well prove to be its undoing.

### Thailand Is Not Lost

**Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit**

**Thailand: Shifting Ground Between the US and a Rising China** by Benjamin Zawacki. Zed, 370 pp., $95.00; $26.95 (paper)

The idea of one country “losing” another implies ownership. It belongs to the vocabularies of the cold war and the Great Game. In Thailand: Shifting Ground Between the US and a Rising China, Benjamin Zawacki argues that since around 2000 the US has “lost” Thailand to China through negligence and bad diplomacy. He assumes that although economic relations among countries are now multilateral, in politics “the world is again more bipolar than multipolar,” with the US on one side and China on the other. “Spheres of influence à la the Cold War,” he writes, “remain the order of the day.” He wants the US to win Thailand back.

Zawacki’s book has two parts. The first, based on published works and interviews, begins around World War II. The US established a presence in Asia during the late 1940s, when British power was receding and the West came to consider Maoist China an enemy. Starting in the early 1950s, as the US became embroiled in Indochina, Thailand was important because it was next door to the conflict and its military was more than willing to be a US ally. The US built seven air bases from which bombing raids were flown into Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, while Bangkok and Pattaya provided sites with “rest and recreation.”

With American support and cash, Thai army officers staged a coup in 1957; they stayed in power for sixteen years. The US built one of its largest embassies in Bangkok and posted its top diplomats there. The Thai army received American hardware, the next generations of the Thai officer corps went to the US for training, and Peace Corps volunteers came in droves. During Thailand’s “American period,” the strategic relationship between the two countries was complemented by many personal ties, from barrack-room camaraderies to marriages between American officials and Thai aristocrats.

Zawacki shows that the relationship faltered when the US began to withdraw from Indochina in 1969. Thailand feared that without US protection it would suffer revenge, especially from Vietnam. Immediately, Thai leaders began talking to China. In 1975 the Thai prime minister, Kukrit Pramoj, visited Mao Zedong. Four years later, China attacked Vietnam, forcing it to withdraw several thousand troops stationed threateningly on the Thai border. This was the first point at which Thailand tilted from the US toward China. But Thailand and the US still needed each other because two decades of war in Southeast Asia had left behind animosity between neighbors, mines and unexploded ordinance, and half a million refugees in Thai camps.

The Thai-US relationship was patched up, largely with military aid. In 1997 Thailand blundered into a financial crisis. In return for its assistance, the IMF demanded that Thailand close down many financial institutions and sharply deflate the economy. The US insisted that Thailand comply with the plan but contributed nothing to the bailout fund. China offered $1 billion (without any evidence, Zawacki claims this sum was never actually paid). This was the second tilt of the scales. For Thailand, the crisis was vicious. A quarter to a third of Thailand’s major companies were destroyed or radically downsized. Millions of people lost their jobs. When asked why the US refused to help its ally, a Treasury deputy secretary explained that “Thailand is not on our border.”

The second part of Zawacki’s book begins in 2001. This section draws on a larger number of interviews and, for the material on late 2004 to early 2010, on the US embassy cables in the WikiLeaks files. Zawacki interviewed American diplomats and officials along with Thai diplomats, generals, officials, journalists, businessmen, and politicians, including the former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra in London in 2015. Zawacki did not interview any Chinese. Throughout this period, he lived in Bangkok, working first on refugee issues and then for Amnesty International.

In Zawacki’s account, two events drew Thailand closer to China in 2001. First, the US had placed its main Asian foreign policy on the Middle East at the expense of everywhere else, especially Asia. Second, Thaksin came to office that year with ambitious plans to change the country’s domestic and foreign policy. A product of Thailand’s American period, Thaksin had attended university in the US, modeled himself after risk-taking American entrepreneurs, and used the vocabulary of American books about how to succeed in business. Most of his cabinet had similar American influences. But Thaksin was also a fourth-generation descendant of an immigrant from China. Most of his associates in business and politics had similar
More than any other domestic or foreign factor—including China itself—the United States has accounted for Thailand's adoption of the China Model, and its foreign policy orientations toward China and the international sphere of influence. That is, both within and outside the kingdom, the US has “lost” Thailand more than China has gained it.

Zawacki identifies two main reasons the US “lost” Thailand. First, it squandered its expertise on Southeast Asia. University professors who traveled to the country, and thousands of Thai students studied in the US. The US was Thailand’s largest economic partner but no longer a source of growth. China's economic rise was growing fast. During Thaksin’s five years in power, Thailand’s trade with China quadrupled. Zawacki describes how Thailand shifted its preference for Chinese leaders to Bangkok, proposed a free trade agreement with China (negotiated in record time by 2003), brokered another between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, began joint Thai-Chinese military exercises, and bought Chinese arms. The stimulus from economic ties with China competed with Thailand’s recovery from the 1997 financial crisis, and Thaksin happily took the credit.

In 2006 Thaksin was swept away by a military coup. The US was obliged to downgrade its official relations, including those involving the military, under rules governing relations with foreign powers after a military overthrow. When US leaders and diplomats called for Thailand to return to democratic rule, Thai supporters of the coup called them misguided and arrogant.

Although Thaksin was forced into exile and Thailand was then run by a string of short-lived governments, Zawacki argues that the changes made during Thaksin’s tenure stuck. China overtook the US as Thailand’s major trading partner and foreign investor. The US failed to conclude a free-trade agreement with Thailand because pharmaceutical companies wanted provisions that would have prevented Thailand from manufacturing its own drugs. Thailand from manufacturing its own pharmaceutical companies wanted The US failed to conclude a free-trade agreement with China (negotiated in record time by 2003), brokered another between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, began joint Thai-Chinese military exercises, and bought Chinese arms. The stimulus from economic ties with China competed with Thailand’s recovery from the 1997 financial crisis, and Thaksin happily took the credit.

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Second, Zawacki argues that the US lost credibility with Thailand because of its inconsistent support for democracy and human rights. The US “has been sufficiently discredit since the late 1990s” by its involvement in the Middle East. Zawacki writes, “the Thais are no longer willing to listen.” Nor has it “been competing with China for influence in how Thai leadership perceives power, treats its people, and applies its laws.”

In other words, the US has failed to reliably present democracy and human rights as alternatives to the China Model. It has allowed its “interests” to override its “values,” and hence is vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy. Zawacki argues that the US must correct for these two failures and make the kind of commitment to Asia that Obama promised but never delivered.

For the sake of America's geopolitical interests—all of them—there is no choice.

Zawacki has seized an unprecedented opportunity. The WikiLeaks cables allow a detailed and intimate view of Thailand in the recent past. But when the data are so rich, there is always a risk that they will narrow one's vision. Zawacki's account is strictly one of diplomacy—international agreements, official visits, arms sales, and military exercises. But a relationship between countries is shaped by other factors too: interactions between their peoples, the legacies of history, and the domestic politics on both sides. Omitting these factors has shaped Zawacki's conclusions.

In recent decades, the US-Thai relationship has changed far more broadly than its diplomatic pivot into China. In 2002, when Thaksin was prime minister, China was perceived by many as an economic threat. The US brought growth, urbanization, and modern culture. Thousands of Thais wanted to travel to the country, and thousands of Thai students studied in the US. The US was Thailand's largest economic partner but no longer a source of growth. China's economic rise was growing fast. During Thaksin's five years in power, Thailand's trade with China quadrupled. Zawacki describes how Thailand shifted its preference for Chinese leaders to Bangkok, proposed a free trade agreement with China (negotiated in record time by 2003), brokered another between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, began joint Thai-Chinese military exercises, and bought Chinese arms. The stimulus from economic ties with China competed with Thailand's recovery from the 1997 financial crisis, and Thaksin happily took the credit.

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repeated mantra of “We are family” is not just good diplomacy. The links between the countries bear comparison with the “special relationship” between the US and the UK. Thailand is important to China as a bridge to the rest of Southeast Asia, where the influence of the Chinese has been complicated by colonial divide-and-rule, ethnic anti-colonial nationalism, and religious tension, particularly over Islam.

US diplomacy in Thailand has also been hostage to the turmoil in recent Thai politics. Zawacki would like Thailand to be a passive backdrop to his story of US–China competition. He sketches Thai politics like a cartoon, colorful but unimportant, and dismisses every leader since 2001 as “authoritarian,” whether installed by election or coup. He calls the popular movements “utterly bankrupt,” finds all politicians except one—former prime minister Chuan Leekpai—“devoid of ideology,” and concludes that the country has shown “a clear preference to rule and to be a passive backdrop to his story of US–China competition. This coalition removed Thaksin by coup in 2006 but failed to destroy the movement itself. It then decided to get rid of what it called “Western-style democracy.” The second coup in 2014 was rougher than anything since the 1950s. The generals dispensed with the window-dressing of an appointed civilian government and ruled on their own. All political activity was banned. A few protesters were detained and intimidated to discourage others. An interim constitution gave the prime minister absolute power. The junta is currently ruling Thailand away from China something of an illusory goal. More importantly, the entire vocabulary of “winning” and “losing” countries seems outdated.

Zawacki argues that the US has “lost” Thailand to China and has to win it back by diplomatic means. But he reaches this conclusion by leaving out most of the story—the exceptional historical links between China and Thailand, the decline of America’s “soft power,” and the complications created by Thailand’s turbulent domestic politics. These factors make prizing Thailand away from China something of an illusory goal. More importantly, the entire vocabulary of “winning” and “losing” countries seems outdated.

The idea of “spheres of influence” with hard borders belongs to the cold war era, during which countries had to belong to one sphere or another. These divisions were required partly for ideological reasons and partly because the patronage offered by the Great Powers was so attractive. Thailand offers a good example of this. For twenty years it depended on the US for investment, protection, arms, scholarships, and the new baubles of modern consumer culture. Remaining independent from outside powers was difficult. Some countries formed a Non-Aligned Movement, but its influence was short-lived. It may be, as Zawacki argues, that two dominant poles have again emerged, but their magnetic force is weaker than it was during the cold war. The ideological division between them is far less stark than the contrast between capitalism and state socialism. The patronage of the Great Powers is less complete and appealing. Countries such as Thailand have grown richer, more sophisticated, and more economically and culturally enmeshed with the rest of the world.

Thailand’s traditional stance has been to keep all options open. In World War II it was officially allied with Japan but established links with the Allies. In the cold war, it was allied with the US but kept doors open to China. Thailand must cultivate its relationship with China, but that does not mean it must change its relations with the US. The world has moved on from the vocabulary of “losing” countries.

There is nothing surprising about China’s growing influence in Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia. For a millennium, China has been the big power to the north that cannot be ignored. Even when official relations between China and Thailand were broken off, Thai leaders found ways to communicate with China through informal channels. What is happening today is not the rise of China but the return to a normal state of affairs from which the colonial and postcolonial eras have been a relatively short intermission.
Sex and Secularism
by Joan Wallach Scott, Princeton University Press, 235 pp., $27.95

Moral Combat: How the Divided American Christians and Fractured
American Politics by R. Marie Griffith, Basic, 395 pp., $32.00

If ever a couple of books were locked in an epistemic cage match it would be the two under review here, written by the same generation of feminist, the subject of sex, religion, and secularism.

I am, by default, in the secularist corner: I come from such religiously indifferent people they couldn’t even bother to be atheists. My sister and I were the only ones of our friends who didn’t go to Sunday school when I once asked why, my father said that he and my mother couldn’t agree on whether to send us to a conservative or a reform temple, so we didn’t go at all. Maybe he meant it as a parable. In any case, that always seemed like religious education enough: minor doctrinal differences blown into major impossibilities. Or impossible conundrums. (As with the Sunnis and the Shi’as, my parents eventually divorced.)

I invoke this secular pedigree because it’s Western feminists of my ilk—who assume that secularism has been women’s ally, who associate religion with the fear of female bodies (coupled with a perverse desire to control them), who play for the Enlightenment team—who Joan Wallach Scott’s polemical Sex and Secularism aims to persuade. A distinguished feminist historian whose career—from labor history, to history of women, to gender theory, to poststructural and postcolonial theory—has tracked the evolution of her discipline, Scott argues here that those of us who thought progress toward women emancipation was paved with cobblestones have been sold a bill of goods.

“In fact,” writes Scott, “gender inequality was fundamental to the articulation of the separations of church and state that inaugurated Western modernity.” Further: “Euro-Atlantic modernity entailed a new order of women’s subordination.” The italics are Scott’s, and in her reckoning, the sexual division of labor central to secularization provided cover for the exclusion of women from the public sphere and indeed from the category of personhood itself.

By this account, the public/private divide that characterizes modernity, by which Scott means the emergence of Western nation-states from the eighteenth century on, simply produced newfangled versions of female subordination rather than rectifying the old ones. Women were associated with religion in secularist discourse—we’re the superstitious, emotional ones—and men with reason; women were assigned to familial, lock-down roles that ran the world, just as before. The difference is that secularism invokes biology instead of divine law to justify its notions of masculine and feminine spheres, trafficking in crackpot medical theories about women and the female brain (men had bigger skulls, women bigger pelvises—guess who was considered the more rational sex).

It’s the sort of stuff that can be racialized, as required, to scientifically explain the inferiority of nonwhite peoples. And indeed it has been: the secularism story has always been a cover-up for anti-Islamism and imperial conquest, according to Scott, serving to justify the claims of white, Western, and Christian racial and religious superiority by projecting its own misogyny onto Islam. Though the word “secularism” itself dates back only to the mid-nineteenth century, its history is so entangled with Orientalism that “whenever the concept was invoked” there was an anti-Muslim aspect at work. All the more so after September 11, 2001: once Islam replaced communism as the primary political threat to the West, secularism was once again enlisted as an emblem of Western freedom, this time to support its variously misbegotten wars on terror.

These are rather large claims, launched at those Scott sees as secularism’s cheerleaders. “Clash of civilizations” Fossil Samuel Huntington is named, along with more recent arrivals in his camp who tout secularism and gender equality as the basis of the West’s superiority to Islam. The philosopher Charles Taylor, though a practicing Catholic, is on the adversaries list for regarding secularism as progressive; universalizers like Martha Nussbaum come under fire for conflating Western versions of sexual liberalization with human rights.

As a default secularist, I felt the sting of Scott’s critique too, for naively buying the conventional story—that women’s political emancipation followed the era of democratic revolutions, which followed the individualizing tendencies set in motion by the Protestant Reformation. In Scott’s deconstructive who-done-it, those of us who failed to notice that any invocation of secularism is inherently anti-Muslim have been colonialism’s allies and dupes.

“The idea that inequality exists solely for Muslim women is simply not true,” she insists. But did anyone really think it was? Solely? It doesn’t exactly mean saying that secularism didn’t end sexism or overwhelm the sexual division of labor. Scott’s position is not, however, that Western and non-Western, Christian and non-Christian societies share persistent patterns of inequality between the sexes. It’s that secularism, which is tethered in this account to modernity, intensified gender inequality.

The accumulated historical culpabilities piled onto secularism can seem a bit overdetermined in Scott’s genealogical account. For instance: the advent of modern secularism and the emergence of modern nations brought “a new insistence on the immutability of gender roles and the policing of sexual activity to keep them in place.” It’s the “new” I wondered about—even Scott admits that such exclusions can be traced back to the ancients. We’re provided with a familiar catalog of the West’s failures to achieve gender equity on wages, political representation, sexual harassment, and so on, yet I could find no comparable discussion of Islam’s successes and failures in these areas.

Is secularism perhaps being asked to answer for what might equally be regarded as the cross-cultural persistence of misogyny? No, Scott insists: “these notions of difference based on sex were fundamental to the conceptualization of political modernity.” Okay, but more fundamental than to religious or premodern societies? Yes, Scott seems to think: the gender differentiations of the non-West were either “imposed by the West, colonialists, usually in the form of family law, or imported...by those seeking to live up to Western models.”

If Scott’s goal is to contest “the unqualified good of the secular” and take back the free pass it hands itself on gender progress, she would need to convince me that her historical table-turning, in which it was actually the discourse of secularism that produced the gendered hierarchies we associate with religiously traditional societies, isn’t just fancy footwork. By fancy footwork, I mean her frequent reliance on what might be called the Foucault gambit: Y, which might seem to postdate X (for perhaps we’ve discursively preceded it (or contains it), and here are a few scattered historical anecdotes that cinch the case, but don’t precisely have less the story. It’s certainly true—I recall my head spinning on hearing George W. Bush invoke women’s rights as a reason for invading Iraq in 2003. Scott’s example is the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, one rationale for which was that barbaric Arabs mistreated their women and needed to be civilized, making the sexuality of the worthy a buried yet constitutive feature of secularism.

Yet—and here’s the Foucault gambit—from Scott’s vantage, the male supremacy of the feature of traditional cultures was actually a byproduct of the colonial legacy. Evidence: in the course of the French colonization of Algeria, it was the colonizer who restricted sharia law to family matters, resulting in separate male and female spheres that hadn’t previously been demarcated. In other words, Arab “tradition,” regarding the sexual role of women came about as a result of colonialism’s secular influence.

This usefully complicates any simple correspondence between tradition and modernity, as does Scott’s discussion of Frantz Fanon’s observations regarding veiling during the Algerian war for independence: the veil was a form of resistance to French inducements to unveil and modernize, yet the veil was also worn, as Scott quotes Fanon, “because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes.” Notice that the secular-leaning Fanon’s firsthand account blurs and possibly contradicts Scott’s more polemical way of telling the story (that such “traditions” were therefore colonial in origin), which left me rereading the passage multiple times in an attempt to square the two.

What often seem, in the course of this book, that Scott’s argument was frequently in contradiction with itself. Perhaps it’s that the meaning of every word—secularism, tradition, modernity—keeps getting recalibrated. There are so many balls in the air, with so much leapingfrogging between continents and time frames and so many extrapolations from the conditions of one moment to pronounce upon another, that it was sometimes hard to keep up.

Scott anticipates such complaints in a note perhaps slightly defensive warning to her readers. Yes, she’s juxtaposing “examples from places with different histories and geographies,” she writes in her introduction, and yes, “some will chafe at what they deem to be overly sweeping transgeographic historical claims,” but such readers are misunderstanding her “polemical aim: to engage and disprove the received wisdom.” And the current representation of secularism as the guarantor of equality between men and women. The meanings of the terms she’s deploying are unstable; her project

Laura Kipnis

Letting Their Hair Down

Cairo, 2005; photograph by Martin Parr

Laura Kipnis
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Pub May 2018. LC 2017053894. 7 x 10 in. 448 pp. color/b&w illus. bib. index.
North Texas

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Griffith Review 59:
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Edited by Julieanne Schultz and Jane Cameron

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Committee on the Review of the Health Effects of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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Pub Jun 2018. 6 x 9 in. 680 pages.

National Academies Press

ISBN 978-0-309-46818-3 P/$105.00

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Committee on Ensuring Patient Access to Affordable Drug Therapies; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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Pub Nov 2017. 6 x 9 in. 234 pages.

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Patrick Samway, S.J.

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Notre Dame


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Kevin Hart

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Pub Feb 2018. LC 2017055865. 6 x 9 in. 92 pp.

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Edited by Josdie R. Duncan and Roger W. Byard

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May 24, 2018
is to expose the purposes to which they've been historically deployed.

Well, perhaps. It was at least helpful to know, when I lost track of the argument, that whatever the example, Western secularism would be the culprit. A case in point is the insistence of veiling in the present, in which Islamic women who voluntarily wear the veil are “self-fashioning”—critiquing secularized religious mascarade—while secular women who don't wear the veil come under Scott's critique for conforming to conventional Western sexual norms.

The postmodernists’ self-fashioning have played out most contentiously in France, beginning in 1989, when a commission ruled that allowing girls to wear headscarves in schools would undermine the principle of laïcité, which advocates for the separation of religious and civil society. The debate surrounding this ruling found French politicians ludicrously attempting to backtrack to the republic’s commitment to gender equality to 1789, arguing for the prohibition of headscarves on the grounds of women’s equality while, needless to say, ignoring it in almost every other sphere. A ban, clearly aimed at West and North African immigrants, eventually went into effect in 2004.

Scott, among whose previous books is The Politics of the Veil (2007), is persuasive when lambasting French politicians for rewriting history, perhaps less so in her conclusion that the contrast between covered and uncovered women was always a creation of Western middle-class ideas of what it means to be free. Presuming that covered women lack the freedom to follow their desires, including sexual desires. Further, while presuming that covered women was always a creation of secularism. Secularists, she maintains, intentionally a human pregnancy was quite common and almost totally unregulated across the United States; “early in the century aborting an affair with a psychoanalyst; or that Lawrence’s retort to T.S. Eliot’s rants against his immorality may have included lashing Lady Chatterley’s dreary husband, Clifton on Eliot. The juxtaposition of deep dives and aerial views makes what could have been dusty stuff into a propulsive read. As a student of Scott, I can appreciate any easy political assumptions. Birth control was promoted not only by progressives but also by eugenicists. The choice to conform to or avoid the rules of race and gender is blameworthy in Scott’s antiseclarist polemic. (For Scott, modernity’s inception is the colonial conquest of (mostly white) cultural space, so that it means sexual liberalization.) Modernity—beleaguered, fray—gets it from all sides.

These frictions are also, to some extent, methodological. For Griffith, gender is a self-evident category: it’s sufficient to demonstrate that women’s bodies are the ones most subject to regulation. For Scott, defining gender involves pages of explanation on the attribution of cultural meanings to sexual bodies, with detours through psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and indeterminacy. For Griffith, progress involves classes of people attaining rights they previously didn’t have. Scott wants us to understand that invoking categories like modernity complicates us in horrible historical crimes. One might argue that Griffith’s account relies on unacknowledged assumptions about race and gender. This may be so, but it’s not overtly clear that it is blameworthy in Scott’s antiseclarist polemic. (For Scott, modernity’s inception is the colonial conquest of (mostly white) cultural space, so that it means sexual liberalization.)

Public sexual controversies too had a way of driving wedges between allies. When Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill faced off over her sexual harassment accusations in 1991, white Christian conservatives threw their lot in with a black alleged harasser; progressive Christian women sided with Hill. They all flipped sides when it came to Paula Jones’s accusations against Bill Clinton in the mid-1990s. One stalwart Christian lawyer on the Jones team who had actually supported Anita Hill argued (under the sway of antimodernist thinkers who wanted to replace civil law with biblical law) that Clinton’s alleged crimes against Jones were “a clear assault on Christ’s view of how men and women should relate to each other in the workplace.”

Whereas Scott faults secularism for not only in mainstream news reports but also religious ones as well. As late as 1871, by which time abortions had been increasingly outlawed, the American Medical Association estimated that 20 percent of pregnancies were ended intentionally.

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A spirtitely writer, Griffith sparkles her social history with textured mini-biographies of the more colorful participants, among them Margaret Sanger, D.H. Lawrence, the sex educator Mary Calderone, and various of their antagonists. Some of her less familiar subjects are drawn from the ranks of the progressive clergy—the fiercely openly gay (and virulently homophobic) Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson, and the pro-choice Baptist minister Howard Moody are moving examples. Griffith is good at veering down interesting byways with out ever losing the reins of the story: I hadn’t known that D.H. Lawrence’s Freudianism was transmitted to him by his wife Frieda, who had once had an affair with a psychoanalyst; or that Lawrence’s retort to T.S. Eliot’s rants against his immorality may have included lashing Lady Chatterley’s dreary husband, Clifton on Eliot. The juxtaposition of deep dives and aerial views makes what could have been dusty stuff into a propulsive read. As a student of Scott, I can appreciate any easy political assumptions. Birth control was promoted not only by progressives but also by eugenicists. The choice to conform to or avoid the rules of race and gender is blameworthy in Scott’s antiseclarist polemic. (For Scott, modernity’s inception is the colonial conquest of (mostly white) cultural space, so that it means sexual liberalization.)

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Freedom,” informing religious health providers that they can refuse to participate in any procedures they object to, presumably abortions. In practice, this apparently includes denying women information about such procedures, even when their health is at risk. Astoundingly, the photograph gracing the site is of a male doctor in a hijab. So an image of a presumably Muslim woman is being enlisted by the Trump administration to endorse the reeregulated female body—the veil is repurposed as a symbol of Western freedom, while Roe continues to get chiseled away. It’s almost as though someone at the White House got an advance copy of Sex and Secularism and was having a bit of fun spinning Scott’s argument like a top.

Griffith’s preference for tales of progress may be why her epilogue on the election of Donald Trump feels a bit muted, as though written under the weight of a great repression. God is going strong in political life these days and appears to have personally stepped in to elect the current president, against every probability. Nor did evangelicals and their pals need to hold their noses to vote for him (as others of us have had to with the various Clintons), so certain were they of his fealty on the only issue that mattered to them: depriving women of abortion rights. He even suggested he’d punish women who had one. Elated, the religious right decided they could overlook the unpalatable stuff—the divorces, the philandering, the gross boasts—as long as he saved those fetuses.

In Griffith’s too apt words, Trump may not have won “in spite of his at-titude toward women but because of it.” Who cares about sexual morality if gender is protected? We’re one nation—of fetuses—under God. Secularism? Not in my lifetime, apparently.

The Curse of Cortés
Alvaro Enrigue

When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting That Changed History by Matthew Restall. Ecco, $26 pp., $35.00

On the road to Toboso, where he is hoping to meet Dulcinea, Don Quixote talks to Sancho Panza about the nature of fame. He mentions four characters from classical literature who achieved it by acts of unlikely valor, Julius Caesar among them. Then he adds a more modern figure: “the gallant Cortés.”

Appearing in Don Quixote alongside Julius Caesar is no mean achievement for a member of the minor aristocracy who enriched himself as a bureaucrat on the furthest shores of the Spanish empire. The reference in Don Quixote de La Mancha is not the only one Cervantes makes to Hernán Cortés. In “The Novel of the Glass Lawyer,” one of the stories in the Exemplary Novels, he mentions Cortés in passing when writing about Venice:

But thanks be to heaven and the great Hernando de Cortés, who conquered great Mexico City so that great Venice would in some way have some competition. These two famous cities resemble each other in their streets, which are all of water: the one in Europe, the admiration of the old world; the one in America, the fright of the new.

That to Cervantes, Cortés should be like Julius Caesar, and that Tenochtitlan—the original name for Mexico City—was a fright (espanio), gives a clear sense of seventeenth-century imperial Spain’s perception of the Conquest of Mexico. Cortés was a figure with the stature of a classical hero, and the city of Tenochtitlan an abomina-tion that was subjugated and occupied by Spain, with Providence guiding Cortés’s arm.

This perception has changed. Any military occupation that directly or indirectly caused the deaths, in less than a century, of 90 percent of the population is hardly one to celebrate. It is true that Aztec civilization continued to be seen as a particularly bloodthirsty one, but the general assessment of it has also become more sophisticated. If Cervantes—a knowledgeable dissident in his time—lived today, he would recognize Cortés as a genocidal killer and would not define Tenochtitlan as a “fright” but as a triumph of environmentally sound engineering whose inhabitants suffered from a worrying tendency to make violent death into a performance.

In When Montezuma Met Cortés, the American historian Matthew Restall examines documents concerning the military conflict that set the Aztecs in opposition to the Spanish empire in 1520. His aim is to reassess the process of simplification by which Cortés, in his letters to King Carlos I (also Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire), justified the permanent occupation of Mexico and gave it a moral basis. Cortés’s vague promises and generalizations were extraordinarily effective—you might accuse him of many things, but not of being unable to tell a convincing story—and indeed, according to Restall, that Emperor Montezuma and Cortés had more important parts in the conflict than was actually the case. Restall argues that the Spaniard’s account would come to distort our understanding of what was in fact a messy and confusing war, one that involved several armies and leaders from several nations, all in alliances with or opposition to one another for a variety of reasons.

Before Cortés sailed to Mexico, he had lived in the Caribbean for fifteen years, first in Hispaniola and then in Cuba. Like other settlers, he received encomiendas, grants that gave him land and the right to exploit the labor of native inhabitants, whom he forced to search for precious metals. He served as a notary in Hispaniola and later was secretary to Diego de Velázquez, Cu-ba’s governor. Restall notes that during this time Cortés did not participate in any of the expeditions that explored or conquered parts of the Caribbean, South America, or Mexico, but rather “lived an ordinary life on Hispaniola and Cuba because he was an ordinary man of ordinary abilities.”

In 1518, Velázquez selected Cortés to lead an expedition along the Mexican coast; according to Restall, he was not a major figure in the power struggles among Cuba’s wealthier and more experienced Spaniards. Before the ships were scheduled to launch, however, Velázquez changed his mind and withdrew his authorization of the mission. Cortés proceeded anyway, departing Cuba with ships and men and landing in Mex-ico on April 21, 1519. What was meant to be an exploratory voyage eventually became, under Cortés’s illicit leadership, one of conquest. Velázquez later tried to get Cortés declared a traitor for his disobedience.

How did this unremarkable man become as famous as Julius Caesar? At the start of his book, Restall makes use of a term coined by Dennis Tedlock, the transla-tor of the Popol Vuh—the holy book of the K’iche’ Mayas—to define historiography in Mesoamerican cultures. According to Tedlock, the pre-Hispanic epics are “mythistories” because they make no distinction between the factual and the legend ary; their function is not to shore up what Westerners define as historical truth, but to supply a foundational narrative that helps a group of people form a collective identity. In the opening pages of When Montezuma Met Cortés, Restall applies Tedlock’s neologism to European narratives of the Conquest. Although European mythologies are based on the historical record, they make use of the beliefs and literary imaginations of those who circulated them with the aim of constructing an ideology that could be exploited for political gain.

In his effort to see history from the Aztecs’ point of view, Restall deploys strategies that have been used before: explaining where indigenous sources came from and how they were written, and examining the work of contempo rary Mexican historians and archae ologists, who have always been more inclined to sympathize with the Aztecs than the European and American writers who had, until recently, domi nated the discourse on the Conquest of Mexico. The most spectacular and pro ductive of Restall’s strategies is purely rhetorical: by renaming the Conquest of Mexico “the Spanish Aztec War,” he grants the losers an active part in it. In this same vein, he refers to the Spanish captains and their men by the name given to them by their Nahua allies and...
Restall begins by looking at the accounts of the first Europeans in Mexico, in which he finds a consistent emphasis on those practices that have earned the Aztecs their fearsome reputation as cannibals and human sacrificers. In one passage that would be amusing had its consequences for the Americas’ native populations not been so devastating, he observes that most estimates of the frequency of human sacrifices in Tenochtitlan come from an unfounded assertion by the Franciscan friar Diego Valadés, who was brought to Tenochtitlan in 1520 on the city fell. Valadés claimed that between 15,000 and 20,000 people were sacrificed in Tenochtitlan per year. Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Cortés’s confessor and the first formal historian of the Conquest of Mexico, accepted this figure, which, with the passing of time, became 20,000 sacrificed children a year. Then Francisco López de Gómara, Cortés’s confessor and the first formal historian of the Conquest of Mexico, raised the figure to 50,000.

This number is remarkable for how preposterous it is: more than 137 sacrifices a day, live an hour, one every twelve minutes, twenty-four hours a day. The practice of human sacrifice was a complex ritualized process that demanded extensive ritual preparation and an individually selected victim, and archaeologists have never found evidence to support the Spaniards’ figures. As Restall points out, although human skulls have been retrieved from ritual burial grounds close to Tenochtitlan’s Templo Mayor (the largest, most important temple), most of the sacrificial remains that have been found belong to animals—wolves mostly—and these remains don’t add up even to hundreds of victims, let alone thousands.

Restall shows that while the Aztecs did indeed practice ritual cannibalism, the fixation on the eating of human flesh in the earliest European accounts of early Mexico had a distinct motive: owing to a royal law from 1503, an enemy fighter who practiced cannibalism could be enslaved for life, and shortly before Cortés left Cuba for Mexico a smallpox epidemic caused a drastic reduction in native manual labor in the Caribbean. The later narratives that were so insistently on the subject of cannibalism are always, in Restall’s view, related to the conquistador generation’s claim to cost-free indigenous servitude. This argument became especially important after the Crown abolished native slavery and gave indigenous subjects rights identical to those of Spaniards in the New Laws of 1542.

Restall reconsiders the myths that surround Cortés and Montezuma, who until recently were seen as equal agents, with the captain taking an active role. His reconstruction of the depictions of Montezuma begins with the archeological findings, which provide insights into his way of governing, and a close look at the descriptions by contemporaries—including Cortés—who saw him as a disciplined, thoughtful, inquiring, exquisitely courteous man. Restall then follows the emperor’s transformation in the Western popular imagination through dramatic, and operatic texts in which he appears as a fearsome despot, an indecisive general, and a weakening in thrust to supplications. This rehabilitation of the character of Montezuma is complemented by a minutely detailed reconstruction of the texts that transformed Cortés from a rebellious captain who began the conquest without authorization into the heroic figure that the Church in Rome, so devastated by the deserts of Henry VIII and his enemies, needed to convey a victorious image. By depicting Cortés as an ingenious strategist, the Church and the Spanish Crown—who had judged him harshly in his lifetime—turned an unattractive war into a providential epic: by the end of the sixteenth century, Cortés had gone from being a political outcast who died in obscurity in 1547, on a trail through the outskirts of Seville, to the antithesis sent by the Holy Spirit to protect Rome and Spain against Lutheran reform.

Restall’s assertion that European accounts of the Spaniards’ invincibility were mythologized is based not only on analysis of documentary evidence, but also on a polemical argument. He asks, as do all of us with any interest in this crucial moment in the expansion of European power and culture, Why did Montezuma decide to lodge the conquistadors peacefully in the palace of his father, the former emperor Axayacatl, right beside his own, in the very heart of Tenochtitlan? By the time of the Spaniards’ arrival in the city in November 1519, Montezuma was already finished as emperor of all Mesoamerica, but he was still the central political figure in a respectable territory, and his army was almost totally intact. He could have simply executed the Spaniards the moment they arrived; he certainly had the power to do so: he argues that Montezuma wanted to save the city—a city that, being an island, was also a trap. Moreover, the Spaniards, on their journey inland, had allied themselves with two cities, Tetzcoco and Texcoco, which had helped him fight the Aztecs in battle. This would have given Montezuma more reason to execute the foreigners.

In his letters to King Carlos I, Cortés frequently suggested that the many legendary gifts sent by the Aztec emperor to the Spaniards as they made their way from Veracruz toward Tenochtitlan, Mexico City were intended to urge them back to the Caribbean. This, says Restall, is unlikely, since Montezuma never attacked them directly despite having countless opportunities during their sojourn in Cortés’s long march. He proposes that something which perhaps should always have seemed obvious: that Montezuma was willing to seduce the conquistadors into Tenochtitlan, entered the city, and were set up in a palace, it’s because that is how Montezuma wanted it.

While Restall’s logical solution to the mystery of the Spaniards’ peaceful entry into Tenochtitlan and their stay there is convincing, his interpretation of Cortés’s death is less so: he argues that Montezuma wanted the Spaniards close to him because he collected specimens of everything in his empire, and as soon as they had disembarked in it, the Spaniards had been transformed into a kind of novelty. It is true that Montezuma’s Tenochtitlan contained a zoo, a botanical garden, and even a kind of vassalage to Carlos I of Spain, telling the Spaniards that prophecies had spoken of their arrival in Mexico and that Cortés was a vassal of a foreign emperor and not—as the Chronicles that followed had it—Montezuma. As he makes clear, the Aztec prince continued to govern peacefully until he was finally taken prisoner by the Spaniards, by which time war was already imminent. Up until that crucial moment the Spaniards, not Montezuma, had the power to decide how and where they moved, as they moved around the city and the empire. When Cortés returned to Veracruz to fight a new contingent of soldiers sent by the governor of Cuba to arrest him, he had to agree to have a unit from Montezuma’s army accompany him without any intention of taking part in the fighting—Restall is convinced they were acting not as supporting troops, but as guards.

However transparent and simple the story that Restall tells, there remains a problem with the documentary evidence. On the first days of November 1519, at the Palace of Axayacatl, Montezuma murdered some kind of vassalage to Carlos I of Spain, telling the Spaniards that prophecies had spoken of their arrival in Mexico and that Cortés was a vassal of a foreign emperor and not—as the Chronicles that followed had it—Montezuma. As he makes clear, the Aztec prince continued to govern peacefully until he was finally taken prisoner by the Spaniards, by which time war was already imminent. Up until that crucial moment the Spaniards, not Montezuma, had the power to decide how and where they moved, as they moved around the city and the empire. When Cortés returned to Veracruz to fight a new contingent of soldiers sent by the governor of Cuba to arrest him, he had to agree to have a unit from Montezuma’s army accompany him without any intention of taking part in the fighting—Restall is convinced they were acting not as supporting troops, but as guards.

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Consequences of his declaration, but the event was recorded and became a crucial element in what would happen later. Though Restall’s book is called When Montezuma Met Cortés, it ignores this part of the archive. A reader unfamiliar with Thomas’s reappraisal of the conversation between the emperor and the captain would be left with the impression that Cortés simply lied about Montezuma’s submission. Like Restall, I myself “love to hate” Cortés, and I do think that his arrival might have been a divine curse. When the Spaniards, after their long stay in the city, took the emperor prisoner, the population rose up. It has never been possible to know for certain whether Montezuma was stabbed by the Spaniards, as the indigenous chronicles would have it, or was stoned by his own people, as the conquistadors claimed. In any case, the Spaniards had to flee Tenochtitlan on June 30, 1520, and took refuge across the lake to launch a counterattack as part of the military alliance largely made up of Tlaxcalteca warriors. According to Restall, the number of fighters exceeded the Aztec army by five to one. The presence of the Spaniards among the invaders was not greatly significant: they made up one soldier in two hundred. In the traditional narrative, the Cortesian epic had something miraculous about it—inexorable without recourse to the Providence of the Catholic God—because the conquistador captain managed to conquer a vast, wealthy empire skilled in the art of war despite having arrived in Tenochtitlan with only 250 soldiers. In his reappraisal, Restall demonstrates that this figure, too, is mythic. Though Cortés did indeed begin his march to Tenochtitlan with a mere handful of men, Spanish ships never stopped sailing to Mexico, bringing soldiers, arms, horses, and slaves. On August 13, 1521, the day Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, was captured by Tlaxcalteca warriors while trying to flee the city, there were 980 Spanish soldiers in Tenochtitlan, four times as many as the historiography has been telling us for almost five centuries. Still more revealing is the fact that between 2,600 and 3,000 Spaniards had disembarked in Mexico over the little more than two years it took for the Aztec empire to be captured: 65 and 70 percent of these soldiers had died in combat or from maladies over the course of the war. What is fascinating about the fall of Tenochtitlan, then, is not the fact that a handful of Spaniards managed—as legend would have it—to win, but what followed: that they ended up governing Mesoamerica despite the precariousness of their own situation once hostilities had ceased. The real victors had been Tetzoc and Axayacatl, and yet the Castilian lords ended up colonizing their language and government on the Aztecs despite having lost two thirds of their soldiers. In Western accounts, one of the reasons the Aztecs had been subjugated, the Spanish administration was miraculously established: on August 14, 1521, Cortés ordered a Te Deum to be celebrated amid the ruins of Tenochtitlan, and Euro- pean surveyors, under the rule and supervision of their captain, were already drafting maps and tracing plots of land and Indian captives among the Spaniards. Restall suggests an explanation for the Spaniards’ improbable success. Immediately after the war, they didn’t have the capital, the men, or the technologies they needed to rule the territory they had just won. The Aztec or Tlaxcalteca nobility, like the nobility of every other Mesoamerican political entity that had direct contact with the conquistadors, maintained its status and privileges, and continued to rule their cities. In 1620, Mexico City was still being governed, under the surveillance of a Spanish viceroy, by Aztec nobility, the descendants of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century emperors. They kept their power, but the population decreased by an imaginable 90 percent during the first eighty years of Spanish occupation due to epidemics and enforced servitude—still the worst genocide in history. The spaces left by the dead were being occupied by unceasing waves of Spanish soldiers, adventurers and their families, Taino and African slaves, priests and monks, and specialized workers needed to construct and maintain the colonial infrastructure. This made the indigenous nobility irrelevant. After the settlement was successfully colonized and Europeanized, it was emptied and repopulated. A hundred and eighty-seven thousand people died during the first century of the occupation of America. Spain’s American epic was the first modern European project of permanent occupation that actually worked. The economic and ecological effects of the Cortesian expedition gave Europe the narrative of a providential destiny. From that day forth, the languages with global reach and power have all been European ones: Spanish is now used to be the most widely distributed language in the world and the second-most spoken language after Mandarin. It was the fall of Tenochtitlan that unleashed the angels and demons of globalization.
The Pleasures of Translation

Emily Wilson

Sympathy for the Translator: A Translation Manifesto
by Mark Polizzotti.

MIT Press, 182 pp., $22.95

In the 2016 Man Booker International Prize was awarded for the first time to a single work of translated literature, which was translated from the Korean. The award was shared by its author, Han Kang, and her translator, Deborah Smith.

Kang and Smith are friendly collaborators. In this article, I discuss Kang’s subsequent work. But the translation aroused controversy late last year when Korean readers accused Smith of not knowing the language well enough and translating irresponsibly, producing an English version that is not really a “translation” at all. Smith’s English version was considered by some to be a betrayal of the original, despite the fact that the author seems to have been perfectly happy with it, and despite the acclaim it received. The literary storm revealed how fraught the entire topic of translation can be, and how little agreement there is about what exactly counts as a good translation.

There were schools working on the history and theory of translation throughout the twentieth century, but the discipline took off as a distinct academic subject in the 1970s, after James Holme, a translator of Dutch poetry into English, called for a new classification of the field in his article “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972). Many who are not themselves practicing translators have built careers out of “translation theory,” while some translators promote theories that seem significantly at odds with their practice. As Mark Polizzotti points out in his new polemic, *Sympathy for the Translator*, contemporary Translation Studies tend to involve “increasingly abstract discourse,” which is useless for helping people understand what translation is, and does nothing to enable the production of better translations—or even (as Polizzotti does not admit) discerning what “better” or “worse” might mean in this case.

The rise of translation theory is partly a response to the increase in courses in colleges and universities on literature read in translation. One of the earliest Great Books courses was developed at Columbia in 1917–1919, as an explicit response to World War I, and many more courses on Great Books or Western civilization sprang up around that time. The interest in translation on Western literature came to seem limited and ideologically dubious. More and more institutions began to offer courses in world literature or global literary studies. Translation is the bedrock of all these courses. Students and their teachers cannot be expected to have access to most of the literary wealth of the world. Translation allows us to cross linguistic boundaries and opens our eyes to ways of thinking about the world and forms of literature. Personally, I feel deep gratitude to the translators who have enabled me to read Korean, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Swedish literature, among others, given that I will not have time to learn any of these languages in the limited number of years I am likely to remain alive.

On the other hand, reading this diverse body of texts in English translation risks creating a false kind of homogeneity. Moreover, English is a language of colonialism and empire, and translation can be seen as yet another tool by which English-speakers impose their hegemony on the world and silence subaltern voices. Emily Apter, in the provocatively titled *Against World Literature* (2013) and the earlier *The Translation Zone* (2005), has pointed to the dangers of the “liberal inclusiveness” implied by the study of world literature in translation, and argued for a greater recognition of what might be untranslatable across literary and linguistic traditions.

Apter’s qualms about the value and ideology of translation are in many ways characteristic of Translation Studies as a whole, which, as Polizzotti suggests, “one of the few disciplines in which the study of a subject seems bent on demonstrating that very subject’s futility.” Two thinkers are revered by many contemporary translation theorists with something like spiritual devotion. The first is Friedrich Schlegel (1768–1834), a German theologian often dubbed the father of modern hermeneutics, who argued for a “foreignizing” style of translation in order to educate and enrich the target language—in his case, German.

The second is the great German-Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin, whose essay “The Task of the Translator” (1932) drew on his mystical notion of “pure language,” the sum of all languages, which can supposedly be accessed when a foreign text is translated with such syntactical literalness as to convey not its meaning, but its “mode of signification.” He suggested that the translator ought to allow his or her own language to be powerfully affected by the language of the original text. Both Schlegel and Benjamin, from somewhat different theoretical perspectives, insisted that there is a metaphorical imperative to create unreadable, undiomatic, clunky translations, the kind condemned by non-theorists as “translationese.”

In recent decades, the two most influential voices in US Translation Studies, both proponents of “forigniz­ haps just a common-sense approach.” His style in this book is more anecdotal than philosophical, and his mode of argument is neither developed nor fully developed. But in a lively, readable, and often funny 151 pages, Polizzotti succeeds in providing a per­ spective that might be wrong with the current state of Translation Studies. At the same time, he of­ fers readers a glimpse into the working life of a practicing translator, and hints at the history, complexity, and importance of the translator’s task.

Polizzotti covers an enormous amount of ground in a short space. He does not pretend to know the history of translation in the West, from debates about how best to translate the Bible to controversies about the proper ways to be “faithful” to classical Greek and Roman literature in vernacular translation. The discussion is, inevitably, selective, but Polizzotti provides vivid details and quotations that give, in his own words, “at least a flambay set of waves in its direction. Particularly enjoyable is the brief discussion of the Bible, a text that is, as Polizzotti points out, unusual because it is so often read in translation, because so many people are passionately attached to incontestable opinions about “correct” biblical translation, and because translators have fought for getting it “wrong.” The Bible is, therefore, a good test case to chart multiple ways that translations might respond to the original language’s meaning. Eugene A. Nida’s “dynamic” equivalence model of biblical translation, in which a phrase such as “white as snow” should be rendered, for a culture without snow, as “white as egret feathers.”

Polizzotti here, as elsewhere, is highly attuned to the ways that translation practices may differ, depending on cultural and literary imperatives. His sympathies throughout the book are with translators and translators who, like Jerome against Augustine, or Ezra Pound against Vladimir Nabokov, have sometimes decided to translate “sense for sense,” not “word for word.” He quotes approvingly the maxim of Dante Gabriel Rossetti that “a good poem [must] not be translated into a bad one.” This principle helps explain why Alexander Pope’s *Iliad* endures, despite being dismissed by the scholar Richard Bentley as merely “a very pretty poem.”

Polizzotti’s central point is that “the single most crucial requirement in producing a viable target version is to be a good reader of the language.” It is never enough to ask if a translator knows the source language well enough to translate from it; we must also ask, always, whether she is a good enough writer of English to create something that will live on its own. In his blithe assumption that there is such a thing as literary value and that you know it when you read it, Polizzotti stands outside the fashions of the contemporary academy: he is quite willing to claim that some pieces of writing are simply better than others.

By this light, what matters most about *The Vegetarian* is not whether Smith preserved Han’s syntax (she certainly did not), but whether she managed to
turn an important work of Korean literature into a novel that was equally powerful in English translation. Similarly, Polizzotti defends Pound’s even more controversial translation (not quite “translation”) of Li Po’s “The River Merchant’s Wife.” Pound played fast and loose with the original Chinese poem, which he claimed was, after all, a version of moving English poem in its own right, and Polizzotti insists that it is “more expressive” as a translation than it is as a Chinese poem closely to the Chinese poem’s structure. Polizzotti meanders around the crucial question of whether a translator can go too far from the original and slip from translating into interpreting, or betray. It depends on whether the result is any good, and we are given no general parameters by which to make this judgment. The important point is whether this or that phrasing or syntax is preserved, but whether the overall result allows the text to speak as best it can “across nebulous cultural boundaries, and not lie mute and moribund on the page.”

But Polizzotti also insists that the translator must have both “respect” and “empathy” for the author or text. He has, again, no general theory about what counts as disrespecting or failing to empathize with the original (accusations that could, of course, be leveled at Pound). Instead Polizzotti insists, repeatedly, that the issue of how to bring any individual author’s style into English is a delicate matter, for which there can be no general answer. For this reason, too, he claims that machine translation, by Google Translate and the like, is not likely to threaten human translators, because machines will always fail to grasp nuance and connotation.

From the point of view of Berman or Venuti, Polizzotti’s sympathy for the peculiar style of Pound would seem highly troubling in both political and ethical terms: Polizzotti’s own versions in English.*

Ezra Pound

There are occasional brief nods to the fact that translations might need updating, and that language and translation practices might change over time. But there is no deep consideration of whether translating a text that has already been translated multiple times is more or less valid than translating it for the first time, and no discussion of the distinctive challenges of translating a work of ancient as opposed to contemporary literature. There is also nothing about the limited factors that translations might be able not only to confirm cultural prejudices (like Pound with Chinese), but also challenge them, shifting the reader’s perception about what a particular language or text “should” sound like—a topic that is of particular interest to me, since I have recently published a translation of the Odyssey that is stylistically and interpretatively quite different from previous versions in English.*

More broadly, Polizzotti has little interest in the philosophy of translation or meaning, or in semantics. He is not particularly concerned at all with onomastics and its role in bringing enriching foreign view-points into monoglot minds and lives. From the deep and intimate interaction between meaning and text and history, if any, he is too willingly to cultural prejudices about the aesthetics of the original, in the service of what I believe to be false models of respect or empathy for Homer.

All caveats aside, Polizzotti has written a lively, likably idiosyncratic sequence of essays on a topic that is of more importance than ever in our globalized world. He comes down always a negative polemic, against the excesses and abstractions of contemporary translation theory. But it is also a positive celebration of the value and difficulty of its subject matter, and its ability to bring enriching foreign viewpoints into monoglot minds and lives. From the deep and intimate interaction between meaning and text and history, if all goes well, something new and beautiful can come into being.

Polizzotti is particularly good on the importance of making sure that literature is enjoyable, so that people actually want to read it. This emphasis is one of the most important benefits of his position outside the academy. Polizzotti’s career as a translator is a model of how to create a career creating translations for which grown-ups voluntarily pay hard-earned money, rather than translations de-sung and written for vulnerable groups of students. The academic theorists often imply that clunky, undiomatic, foreignized translations are good for us, no matter how undiomatic they are. Polizzotti makes one feel that creating and reading translated literature can be a genuinely pleasurable experience. He invites one to imagine the possibilities that can come from meeting, “somewhere beyond our… borders, a thought… [that] will have the power to move the world, or at least our world.”
Filmmaker by Accident
James Quandt

by Mrinal Sen, with photographs by Subhash Nandy. Seagull, 285 pp., $27.50 (paper)

Over almost a century, the Bengali film director Mrinal Sen has witnessed mass famine, the partition of his homeland and the ceding of his birthplace to another country, deadly street battles between Maoist guerrillas and the police, and the rise to power of right-wing nationalists in his traditionally leftist state. Sen responded to historical calamity by cultivating what he called “rough edges,” a rejection of the formal refinement and tonal subtleties of his Calcutta compatriot and inspiration Satyajit Ray, with whom he frequently sparred in the press. Extending the humanism of Ray’s celebrated Apu Trilogy in more experimental directions, Sen became a seminal figure of India’s “parallel cinema,” which was less the counterpart that its name suggests than an utter refusal of the predominant model of filmmaking in the subcontinent, now colloquially known as Bollywood. Humane, intellectual (but, he claims, not at all erudite), religiously agnostic and politically radical, contradictory inclined to blunt appraisal and cunning ambiguity, Sen gradually transformed from a polemicist to a poet committed to incertitude. “Life itself is uncertain and inconclusive,” he has said. “Then why should I make a creation conclusive? Thus, all my films are open-ended.”

Now ninety-four, Sen grew up during the era of Gandhi’s protest against colonial rule, in rural Faridpur, “an unknown little town belonging to the ancient landmass of undivided India,” as the director describes it in a rambling but ultimately moving memoir— included in the recently republished collection of his essays and interviews, Montage—that depicts his reluctant return to his birthplace after many decades away. Located in East Bengal at the time of his birth, after the 1947 partition, Faridpur was apportioned to Bangladesh.

Born into a Hindu household teeming with siblings—there were a dozen children in all—the progressive anti-British nationalism of his father, a lawyer who, risking his own arrest, fearless defended patriots, politicians, and others who could not afford legal representation. The capacious though crowded Sen home, which frequently also accommodated relatives of inmates awaiting the death penalty, may well have provided the young Mrinal with the fraught sense of domestic privilege that trust, camaraderie, and even a literal feeling dishonesty make life more bearable.

Standing rigid in his rectitude that he fires his own ineptitude, and dismisses the follow-up, Under the Blue Sky (Nil Akasher niche), on the first page of Montage as “over-sentimental, technically poor, visually unsatisfying,” although he adds that “its political thesis which upholds the notion that the struggle for independence is inseparably linked to the liberal world’s crusade against fascism and imperialism” did win the admiration of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Sen grants that his third film, Wedding Day (Baishey Sravan), “made me feel great. It wasn’t really a great film, but I felt good nevertheless.” In its epic emphasis on crumbling architecture, its intensive spatial constraint— “the camera remains indoors . . . and moves outside only once,” the director claims—and its oblique treatment of the 1943 Bengal famine, which eventually destroys the already deteriorating relationship between a man and the much younger bride his widowed mother chose for him, Wedding Day became a kind of formal and thematic template for Sen’s subsequent cinema. Caused in part by British colonial policy, the famine killed millions, leaving the streets of Calcutta strewn with the dead and dying, and would recur in Sen’s films, both as actuality and metaphor.

“I came to cinema fairly late,” Sen states in the first entry of Montage, an essay charting what he calls his “uncertain journey” toward his vocation as a filmmaker after training in physics at the Scottish Church College and working as a traveling medicine salesman. In one of many disarming anecdotes, Sen recounts that on his last night at home before decamping from Faridpur for Calcutta,

Making certain that his father was within earshot, I asked my mother, “Ma, have you ever noticed any exceptional quality in me? You know…like great personalities display in their childhood? Any flash of genius?”

That flash was scarcely apparent in Sen’s first films, made after he encountered Rudolf Arnheim’s Film as Art at the Imperial Library, a theoretical treatise on the aesthetics of cinema that inspired him to enter the film industry, first as a sound technician, then as a director. The sometimes caustically self-critical Sen prefers that his cinematic innovation led to his first popular hit, Bhuvan Shome, a sweet-natured story in which the anonymous bureaucrat—an aging railway employee so rigid in his reticude that he fires his own son for laziness—learns from a young peasant woman whom he encounters on a bird-hunting expedition in Gujarat that trust, camaraderie, and even a little dishonesty make life more bearable. The director Shyam Benegal claims that Bhuvan Shome is widely considered the pioneering work of the Indian New Wave (or “parallel cinema”), was as important to the development of Indian cinema as Satyajit Ray’s Pather Panchali, the first work in his Apu Trilogy, made more than a decade earlier.

An avid cinephile, Sen had been greatly affected by Francois Truffaut’s The 400 Blows and Jules and Jim, which he saw in 1965. The French director’s influence is readily evident in the fusillade of New Wave devices that Sen employed in Ratbhore (Night’s End), his second feature, including a rapid montage of actualities at the start of the film (images of fellow Bengalis Satyajit Ray and Ravi Shankar, shots of street protests in Calcutta); a
profusion of freeze frames clearly modeled on the famous one that concludes The 400 Blows; and a startling play with image masking, an archaic technique that Raoul Coutard had already used in Jules and Jim. Sen will, for instance, suddenly freeze on a widescreen close-up of Shome choking a cigarette and mask the top frame with the bottom one and leav...ing a constrected, mail-slot-like frame that conveys the narrowness of the bureaucrat’s purview.

The broad comedy of Bhavna Shome maintains traces of Bollywood’s confectionary style that Sen so adamantly rejects. (I “cultivate a fierce loathing towards our vapid indigenous films,” he writes, claiming they have “nothing to do with art or Indian reality.”) But the film’s aural and visual experiments and unfettered, sometimes improvised plots, were sharp contrasts to Bol...lywood’s garish romantic-musical conventions. Sen jettisoned the tripod on which his cinematographer relied and blithely interpolated animation (a flock of hand-drawn birds circles Shome’s head as he studies his “shooter’s bible” to prepare for the bird hunt), swish pans, point-of-view shots, blackouts, and a stuttering montage of repeated zooms into a photograph intercut with shots of a train. (Sen’s dilatory traveling shots, in which the camera fastens on the turning wheel of Shome’s carriage or follows the leisurely advance of a bullcart, anticipate similar attenuations of transport in the modernist cinema of Manoel de Oliveira.) Sen also innovated on the soundtrack, which included extraneous bursts of tabla and sitar, electronic dis...tortion, and sudden silences.

One of Sen’s major achievements, the so-called Calcutta Trilogy, which portrayed the director’s beloved city during the clashes between Maoist Naxalites and the police that broke out there in 1970, was made in the spirit of “madness and . . . freshness” that the director found in the French New Wave. Here, however, Sen changed the coordinates of the militancy of Jean-Luc Godard, who emerged from the riots of May 1968 newly radicalized and dedicated to a new, collectivist Marxist cinema. Sen too remade himself as an artist. I went wild. I released everything that was madding, restless, nervous, boozed-up bourgeois smugly declar...ing a posh cocktail party that “a new India is being born” with a shot of squalling babies in a Calcutta slum, and lets the screen proliferate with the word “despair” in a Godardian intertitle.

“When I use the word ‘blatant,’ I mean it and write it in a positive sense,” Sen writes, claiming they have “nothing to do with art or Indian reality.” (Calcutta 71 became a local hit partly because its documentary footage of street riots offered final glimpses of students shot dead to their grieving friends and relatives.) Patdhat, however, revealed a more eloquent stylist in long takes that required complex navi...gation of interior space; at one point, a young Punjabi woman recounts her family’s troubled past in a shot that lasts over two unedited minutes as it smiously moves between characters and various areas...

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Sen claims that Ray’s fault lay in moving away from interiority to “exter...or reality,” a transformation that proved the opposite of his own. In the first chapter of Montage, he writes that his 1979 film And Quiet Rolls the Day (Ek Din Pratishth), in which a family spends a night anxiously awaiting the return from work of the eldest daugh...ter, their only breadwinner, marked the beginning of a new phase in my career as a film...maker. . . . I am always trying to delve into the interior, into that realm which lies behind the façade of the outside world; to discover mysteries, frustrations, confusions, contradictions.

Sen experienced his own “ten years of a master” in the decade from And Quiet Rolls the Day in 1979 to Su...ddenly One Day (Ekdin Achanak) in 1989. (The repetition of “Ek Din” in these titles and novels, though he avoided the proof and do other tasks. I have ...the influence of Jean-Luc Godard, who emerged from the riots of May 1968 newly radicalized and dedicated to a new, collectivist Marxist cinema. Sen too remade himself as an artist. I went wild. I released everything that was madding, restless, nervous, nervous, boozed-up bourgeois smugly declar...ing a posh cocktail party that “a new India is being born” with a shot of squalling babies in a Calcutta slum, and lets the screen proliferate with the word “despair” in a Godardian intertitle. I wrote, claiming they have “nothing to do with art or Indian reality.” (Calcutta 71 became a local hit partly because its documentary footage of street riots offered final glimpses of students shot dead to their grieving friends and relatives.) Patdhat, however, revealed a more eloquent stylist in long takes that required complex navi...gation of interior space; at one point, a young Punjabi woman recounts her family’s troubled past in a shot that lasts over two unedited minutes as it smiously moves between characters and various areas...

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In The Ruins and In Search of Famine, he offered a kind of self-excoriation: the first centers on a photographer (in the original short story he had been an angler), the second on a film director making a movie about the 1943 Bengal famine. Both artists, easily read as self-portraits, appear unaware of the arrogance with which they intrude into destitute villages to capture images of decay and suffering and the ease with which they abandon their miserable subjects to return to comfortable lives in the city. "I am a filmmaker by accident and an author by compulsion," Sen once claimed. His graphomania has resulted in a book that is erratically edited, repetitious, and littered with stylistic and factual gaffes. The author who allowed accident into his artistry might remain untroubled by the many mistakes he makes in Montage. Sen misrepresents Lev Kuleshov's famous experiment in filmic perception, mis-spells the names of directors (Stork, Gleizer), curators (Tom Ladi), and characters (logor); mismatches movies (The Stakker) and misconstrues important details in describing several films, including the final sequence of Antonioni's La Notte.

The Silent Type
David W. Blight

Grant
by Ron Chernow.
Penguin, 1,074 pp., $40.00


For a century and a half Ulysses S. Grant has been a baffling and inspiring presence in the American literary and historical imaginations. Born in 1822 and raised by a pious Methodist mother, as a young man he was quiet, given to depressions, and lacking much ambition. Only his love of horses seemed to animate him and give him a reason to excel in his education at West Point, which his scheming father desired for him more than he did. In his thirties, he was a complete failure, at times a drunkard, destined to die forgotten. He found his vocation and success on America's killing fields; his meteoric trajectory in the Civil War makes him a remarkable case of a nobody who became almost everything. He comes down to us like a figure out of the tangled mythology of Horatio Alger: Grant in his muddy boots, a distinguished if bracing experience in the pantheon of George Washington, John D. Rockefeller, and Alexander Hamilton. Here Chernow falls into one of the traps of Grant biography: presenting more opposite political poles, all of whom seem to adore him. Sen has always praised and encouraged his stars and technicians, even while patiently ordering retakes necessitated by their errors. (They would accept much lower remuneration for the honor of working with him.) But his generosity has not always extended to other directors—he implies here that Michelangelo Antonioni is a fallen master and accuses the prominent Algerian auteur Mohammed Alj of dishonesty and impotence—or to himself. Sen dismissed the Marxist allegory of his late film Genesis as "crap."

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Grant's domestic world became a scene of inevitable prelude to his later greatness. Grant’s “momentary disgrace," he writes, “can be seen in retrospect as his salvation, preserving him for the starring role in the Civil War.” Walking around with a “stoope" in 1859, he hardly looked fit for anything so lofty. Historians should resist the teleology of destiny, no matter how good the story. On Grant’s ideologically divided families, Chernow shines. Julia Dent, whom the young officer met through a West Point roommate, came from a slaveholding family; her father, “Colonel" Frederick Dent, presided over a plantation, White Haven, southwest of St. Louis. In 1850 the Dents owned thirty slaves. Julia would change her views drastically during the war, partly through loyalty to her husband. She became a Unionist, but her family remained staunch Confederates. Grant’s father never mentioned his mother were abolitionists. He grew up in Ohio, rigorously opposed to slavery at least “in theory,” as Chernow points out. But in the tumultuous 1850s, because of his marriage, Grant was obliged to live in the midst of slavery and was nearly disowned by his own family for it. His parents refused to attend his wedding. Chernow sometimes glides over major historical and political developments. But he does demonstrate that the secession crisis “clarified” Grant’s politics and transformed him into an “outright militant" intent on preserving the Union and ending slavery. Not so the Dents; Grant’s domestic world became a scene of “sectional warfare." Before the war, he not only “dithered” away his talent, says Chernow, he was also trapped between—and almost smothered by—two very different fathers. His own father vicariously lived out ambitions through his son, interfering with him, chastising him, and ultimately basking in the glory he achieved. His father-in-law took to the field. His son should be able to get enough for his precious daughter, then fully supported Confederate independence and slavery during the war that made his son-in-law the most famous deathbed writing in America; his only regret was that he should havewritten more for drunkenness. By the time the hapless soldier borrowed more money from his West Point friends James Longstreet and Simon Buckner—later to become Confederate foes—and made it to Ohio, he was broke, a failure, and at odds with his domeincering father. In the next five years Grant, with his wife, Julia, and his growing family of four children, tried farming and real estate in her native Missouri. He failed miserably at those as well and then sold firewood on the streets of St. Louis in an old faded army coat, prompting Chernow to call him "a bleak defeated little man with a mysterious aura of solitude."
As the scholar Joan Waugh observed, Grant’s “reputation is often determined by whether or not the historian in question deems the Civil War was a ‘good war.’" Since at least the 1950s Grant biographies have followed roughly that pattern. From the 1890s to the 1930s, when the Lost Cause tradition predominated and Robert E. Lee developed into a national cult of heroism, Grant biographers, like Lloyd Lewis, whose celebratory Grant Takes Command (Little Brown, 1960), and Senator Charles Sumner during Reconstruction, the greatest challenge of Grant biographers. He became in McFeely’s masterful prose the fascinating, dark personality of a man of such passive, intellectual and emotional bearings, which explains what Chernow calls the “split personality” of a man of such passive, intellectual and emotional bearings, which are thegien’s postwar life: finding standing of Southern bitterness and struts. Grant was at times sickened by the relentless slaughter of his foe. Simpson challenged the idea of Grant as a failed, inept president in his fine book Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861–1868 (1991) and wrote a superb second treatment of the general’s full military career, Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822–1865 (2000). He rejected the Vietnam-era, antiwar sensibility in Grant biography and anticipated the recent surge in thick volumes on the former captain’s strange political career. Simpson resurrected the two terms of Grant’s presidency from the dustbin of history, showing that one can understand Reconstruction if one only considers Grant corrupt or irrelevant. In 2016, the distinguished Lincoln scholar Ronald C. White came out with a biography, American Ulysses, that brought new attention to his subject’s region, especially his mother’s Methodism; to Grant’s wife, who played a crucial part in his life; to the general’s fascination with war and writing. White is interested less in questions of whether the Civil War was just than in the details of Grant’s emotional and intellectual bearings, which he argues gave him the verve to support equal rights for African-Americans.3

2Bruce Catton, U.S. Grant and the American Military Tradition (Little Brown, 1954); Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (Little Brown, 1960), and Bruce Catton, Grant Takes Command (Little Brown, 1969).
4Also see major recent biographies by Jean Edward Smith, Grant (Simon and Schuster, 2001); H.W. Brands, The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace (Doubleday, 2012); and Charles W. Calhoun, The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant (University Press of Kansas, 2017).
**Meet Jerry Joyner**

Jerry Joyner is a pioneer in the field of illustrated storytelling, having created a unique and influential picture book that has inspired readers of all ages. Joyner's work is a testament to the power of visual and conceptual revolutions, as he combines imaginative narrative with compelling illustration to create stories that are as influential today as they were when first published.

Joyner's early work, **Thirteen**, is a prime example of his innovative approach to storytelling. This picture book, which was first published in 1973, has become a classic and remains in print today, continuing to captivate and inspire readers. Its enduring popularity is a testament to the timeless appeal of Joyner's vision.

**Thirteen** is a story that explores the nature of transformation and metamorphosis, using a series of thirteen tableaus that reflect various aspects of human experience. Each tableau is a mini-epic in its own right, offering a glimpse into the human condition through the lens ofJoyner's unique storytelling technique.

Joyner's influence is felt not only through his own work but also through his impact on subsequent generations of artists and writers. He has been a mentor and inspiration to many, and his legacy continues to inspire new generations of creators.

**Jerry Joyner**

Hence, Jerry Joyner is a name to be remembered in the annals of children's literature. His work continues to influence and inspire, reminding us of the power of stories to connect and to transform.
The Cold War: A World History by Odd Arne Westad. Basic Books, 710 pp., $40.00

The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War by Benn Steil, Simon and Schuster, 608 pp., $35.00

Two American academics have written big, serious, and thoroughly intelligent studies of the cold war. In The Cold War: A World History Odd Arne Westad, a professor of US–Asia relations at Harvard, covers the entire period that is conveniently, and at times, conveniently, held to have started in about 1947 and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. He questions whether those dates really fit the history (he sees the conflict taking shape, or at least germinating, as far back as the 1890s). Most perceptively, he examines all the related conflicts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and doesn’t treat them as mere peripheral damage thrown off by the “main” European confrontation. Westad shows that hot wars in Angola, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Vietnam fed back into and often violently altered the course of the broader East-West standoff.

In The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War, Benn Steil, currently at the Council on Foreign Relations, puts together and expands work that has already been much admired (his *The Battle of Bretton Woods* studied the first phase of his subject in close-up*). The Marshall Plan, with which the US helped rebuild Western European economies after World War II, had a short life, effectively starting in 1948 and winding up in 1952, but Steil embeds it in a sharp and critical political history of the first years of the cold war itself. In his final chapters, he looks far beyond the immediate phases of the Marshall Plan and discusses parallels and contrasts with the twenty-first-century scene.

Both historians are inclined to think that the United States handled relations with Russia in cold war shrines for at least less stupidly—in the late 1940s than in the decades after 1991. Westad complains of what he calls “post–Cold War puzzlement” and the absence of a lack of imaginative leadership.” Steil deplores the lack of an “American Grand Strategy” today, or of any proposal as coherent as George Kennan’s “containment”; he considers policy today to be mere improvisation, while the behavior of NATO and the European Union toward Russia has been unrealistic and provocative. Like Westad, Steil thinks that there should have been more effort to integrate post-Communist Russia into European trade and security arrangements. But neither historian fantasizes that the cold war could have been entirely avoided. Westad writes:

> There were points along the way when leaders could have held back, especially on military rivalry and the arms race. But the ideological conflict that was at the bottom of the post–World War II tension made such sensible thinking very difficult to achieve. In that sense, it was its ideological components that made the Cold War special and hyperdangerous. People of goodwill on both sides believed that they were representing an idea whose very existence was threatened. It led them to take otherwise avoidable risks with their own lives and the lives of others.

Steil writes that “given how the two sides saw their vital interests, the conflict was inevitable.” He concedes that “the Marshall Plan accelerated and intensified it.” But he goes on to suggest that the “Plan, in accelerating the political division of [Germany], … pushed the two sides toward what may have been the only feasible compromise to avert hot war.”

> Who wanted that division? Whose fault was it that Europe was split by what Churchill called an “iron curtain” running from the Baltic to the Adriatic? Both Westad and Steil agree that Stalin did not want it, at least in the first postwar years. He preferred a united Germany under Allied four-power administration, which could be systematically looted of its industrial base as reparations. At this stage, he was content to leave the nations occupied by the Red Army as unconvincing “Peoples’ Democracies,” spared full “Sovietization” but ruled by coalition governments in which Communists held the important ministries and the monopoly of force.

As a matter of history, it was American, not Soviet, policy that divided Europe. At some stage, a “firebreak” strategy seems to have been formulated, though neither Westad nor Steil says so explicitly. Cutting loose and abandoning the hands under Stalin’s control was apparently held to be the only way to block Soviet communism’s advance over Western Europe—either by military offensive or, as Western leaders considered more likely, by a pandemic of Communist ideology spreading to the hungry, jobless millions crouching in the ruins of French, Italian, and German cities.

Both fears, in retrospect, were delusions. Stalin had no intention of plunging westward. The other fear, that misery would drive whole populations to communism, was expressed in General Lucius Clay’s famous dictum: “There is no choice between being a Communist on 1500 calories a day and a believer in democracy on 1000.” Much later, President Johnson was to repeat that “poverty is a disease” more—and only your alliance with the satellite countries,” he noted.

The impact on Poland was disastrous. Polish Communists were handed a crushing argument: the Americans are not your friends but “imperialists” who plan to let a restored German Reich seize Polish territory once Germany’s favor. The following year, Secretary of State George Marshall, representing the Potsdam Declaration and returning parts of Silesia and Pomerania to Germany.

The generous urge to save European nations—including bankrupt Britain—from starvation and economic collapse was real enough. At the end of the war, fifty million Europeans were homeless. Forty percent of Germany’s housing had been destroyed; daily calorie consumption in the British occupation zone was down to 1,050 by early 1947. Inflation in Hungary hit 160,000 percent per day. Relief had to come before economic collapse. But was not the Marshall Plan also designed precisely to be rejected by Stalin, so that his tyranny over Eastern Europe could be exposed and the “diseased” economies and politics of “his Europe” irrevocably distanced from the West? The planners’ worst moment came when it looked as if the Soviet Union might apply to join: their relief was immense when Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin’s foreign minister, walked out of the preparatory talks in May 1947.

The course of events in western Europe is demonstrating… that highly developed countries cannot be captured by Communist propaganda and infiltration… They do not react to hunger, inflation, and the paralysis of government by turning to the Communist Party. They turn to the right, not the left.

But this heretical opinion fell on deaf ears. A State Department document in the same year claimed that “totalitarian forces” were hoping that the food and financial situation in Europe this winter will produce economic conditions sufficiently serious that they can be aggravated by aggressive communist actions to a point where the position of democratic governments in France and Italy can be made untenable and communist regimes installed.

A firebreak plowed across Europe might keep those red flames from leaping across to the West. Back in 1945, George Kennan had written to “Chip” Bohlen at the Yalta Conference that the United States needed to “divide Europe frankly into spheres of influence—keep ourselves out of the Russian sphere and keep the Russians out of ours.” Some eighteen months later, in September 1946, Secretary of State James Byrnes delivered his famous Stuttgart speech, warning that the first sparks of reconciliation to defeated Germany, Poland’s new western frontier along the Oder-Neisse line had been agreed on by the Allies at the Potsdam Conference, but now Byrnes said that it might be changed again in Germany’s favor. The following year, Secretary of State George Marshall, representing the Potsdam Declaration and returning parts of Silesia and Pomerania to Germany.

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Both historians are inclined to think that the United States handled relations with Russia in cold war shrines for at least less stupidly—in the late 1940s than in the decades after 1991. Westad complains of what he calls “post–Cold War puzzlement” and the absence of a lack of imaginative leadership.” Steil deplores the lack of an “American Grand Strategy” today, or of any proposal as coherent as George Kennan’s “containment”; he considers policy today to be mere improvisation, while the behavior of NATO and the European Union toward Russia has been unrealistic and provocative. Like Westad, Steil thinks that there should have been more effort to integrate post-Communist Russia into European trade and security arrangements. But neither historian fantasizes that the cold war could have been entirely avoided. Westad writes:

> There were points along the way when leaders could have held back, especially on military rivalry and the arms race. But the ideological conflict that was at the bottom of the post–World War II tension made such sensible thinking very difficult to achieve. In that sense, it was its ideological components that made the Cold War special and hyperdangerous. People of goodwill on both sides believed that they were representing an idea whose very existence was threatened. It led them to take otherwise avoidable risks with their own lives and the lives of others.

Steil writes that “given how the two sides saw their vital interests, the conflict was inevitable.” He concedes that “the Marshall Plan accelerated and intensified it.” But he goes on to suggest that the “Plan, in accelerating the political division of [Germany], … pushed the two sides toward what may have been the only feasible compromise to avert hot war.”

> Who wanted that division? Whose fault was it that Europe was split by what Churchill called an “iron curtain” running from the Baltic to the Adriatic? Both Westad and Steil agree that Stalin did not want it, at least in the first postwar years. He preferred a united Germany under Allied four-power administration, which could be systematically looted of its industrial base as reparations. At this stage, he was content to leave the nations occupied by the Red Army as unconvincing “Peoples’ Democracies,” spared full “Sovietization” but ruled by coalition governments in which Communists held the important ministries and the monopoly of force.

As a matter of history, it was American, not Soviet, policy that divided Europe. At some stage, a “firebreak” strategy seems to have been formulated, though neither Westad nor Steil says so explicitly. Cutting loose and abandoning the hands under Stalin’s control was apparently held to be the only way to block Soviet communism’s advance over Western Europe—either by military offensive or, as Western leaders considered more likely, by a pandemic of Communist ideology spreading to the hungry, jobless millions crouching in the ruins of French, Italian, and German cities.

Both fears, in retrospect, were delusions. Stalin had no intention of plunging westward. The other fear, that misery would drive whole populations to communism, was expressed in General Lucius Clay’s famous dictum: “There is no choice between being a Communist on 1500 calories a day and a believer in democracy on 1000.” Much later, President Johnson was to repeat that “poverty is a disease” more—and only your alliance with the satellite countries,” he noted.

The impact on Poland was disastrous. Polish Communists were handed a crushing argument: the Americans are not your friends but “imperialists” who plan to let a restored German Reich seize Polish territory once Germany’s favor. The following year, Secretary of State George Marshall, representing the Potsdam Declaration and returning parts of Silesia and Pomerania to Germany.
less than five years old, up from one tenth in 1939).

The gigantic Allied air offensive, in other words, had left the working population starving, cold, and homeless, but had largely preserved the factories. If the rocket fuel for twentieth-century economies was access to hard currency, new equipment, and an army of unemployed skilled labor, then West Germany's "economic miracle" in the 1950s was inevitable.

How much of the European recovery, though, can be ascribed to the Marshall Plan? In its four-year run, the plan transferred to Western Europe almost today's value—of $130 billion to the sixteen Marshall Plan countries. But economic recovery was already underway when it began, and the benefits from the aid were between 2 and 7 percent to growth figures, but Steil finds it hard to explain just how or why. The late historian Alan Milward, that great English contrarian, argued that Marshall aid had been completely unnecessary: Western Europe would have recovered without it. But he also claimed that the hunger statistics were unrepeatable because they ignored the existence of the black market. Steil retorts that Milward was talking nonsense.

The original intention was for the Marshall Plan to give European economies economic security, allowing American troops to be withdrawn. As the cold war began, Washington soon changed its mind: military security was still needed to allow the plan to gain European confidence, and the first steps toward a North Atlantic pact were taken. (Steil allows himself a heavy pun here: "The Marshall Plan needed a martial plan.") The Communist camp used this to justify its argument that the plan was only an arm of "Wall Street imperialism," relying on bayonets to force Western Europe into accepting American-free-market-capitalism.

The plan obviously gave a boost to American exports; Congress would never have passed the plan if it hadn't. Mar-
shall and his colleagues hoped to see the walking-away of European planned economies and their replacement by American-style private enterprise, but in the 1950s the radical socialism in Britain and French state-driven investment programs frustrated them. Clement Attlee's government spent heavily to achieve production and part funds on paying off debt, rather than on industrial imports from the United States. But in occupied Ger-
many Western occupation was suppressed attempts to nationalize industry in the American zone and even blocked mild schemes for worker participa-
tion (the Mitbestimmung that was to be seen in American union politics). "They were foreign to my way of thinking—and to the American way of thinking," he later wrote. When the British Labour Party, in a move to please West Germany: "They were foreign to my way of thinking—and to the American way of thinking," he later wrote. When the British Labour Party, in a move to please West German...
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peace since the Second World War.” Sanctions were clamped on the Soviet Union. Military aid was sent to the anti-Soviet Mujahideen in Afghanistan and to the contras in Nicaragua. “Ulf-timately,” Westad comments, “diplomacy was defeated by politics in the United States…. Most Americans were simply not ready to tolerate that the United States could have an equal in interna-
tional affairs, in the 1970s or ever.”

From 1979 on the “little cold war” broke out between the superpowers, as the Soviet Union and NATO stationed new medium-range missiles in Europe and Eastern European dissidents argued over priorities with Western nuclear disarmers. But in 1985 Mikhail Gorb-
achev took power in Moscow, and within a few years he and Ronald Rea-
gan had melted the mutual fear of the cold war down to the beginnings of a sometimes frosty partnership. Did any-
one win the cold war? Westad accepts that America won. To a European, it looked more as if one of the great duel-
ists had thrown his weapon down in the snow, gone home, and died.

There followed what has been called “the new world disorder.” Far from in-
heriting the earth, the United States found that it was losing control even of the large part of the world that it had dominated during the cold war. Atti-
tudes that should have changed did not. Many chances were missed. There was no Western response to Gorbachev’s vision of a “common European home” and a world united to abolish poverty. The Warsaw Pact abdicated itself, but NATO and the European Union sur-
vived, expanded, and continued blindly to behave as if the rules of the cold war that had formed them still applied. In conse-
quence Russia, which might have been brought into a partnership with the West, was edged into paranoid hostility. Was the Cuban missile crisis the most
dangerous moment? Maybe not. Westad thinks that an equally perilous epi-

code came in 1983: East–West relations were already inflamed after the Soviets shot down a Korean airliner, and when the NATO “Able Archer 83” exercise, simulating nuclear “conflict escalation,” suddenly ceased to look like a simu-
lation. At other times, migrating birds were briefly identified as incoming mis-
siles. For us in the West, the cold war can seem in retrospect the best method even for foolish wars. But we did not luck out. Millions in post-
colonial countries dragged into that struggle didn’t share our luck.
some powerful drugs: Seconal to go to sleep and amphetamines (Dexedrine, Benzedrine) to wake up. The amphetamines, combined with the long, long hours of work that they supported—they rehearsed the dancers until they dropped—kept him in a state of sometimes irritable, sometimes euphoric hyperactivity. Without them, he could hardly think or even talk. (He had to lay out your lines in your quick-change booth, one dancer said.) Flying high, he did not mind scolding others for flying low—for not screaming, not taking drugs, not changing bedmates every two weeks. Such an approach may seem unnecessarily cruel to us now, but in the United States these were boom years for Freud’s reputation. In his mind, that getting naked meant telling the truth. Hair was less than a decade down the road.

At the same time that this boundary was being breached in his mind, so was another. In the early twentieth century, the major innovation in musical theater was the advent of realism, the elision of the song with the stage action. Before the actors would be doing something or other; then, typically, they would stop and break into a song related to what they had been doing. Gradually, in the 1930s and 1940s, this changed. The song would grow out of the action. The actors would be doing something in a song and pretending to think about their nice new buggy, and then, as naturally as the choreographer could manage it, this would turn into a song, and maybe a dance, too. But it was not a ramping up of modernism throughout the arts, show dancing got tired of realism. As Fosse put it, “I get very antsy watching a show in which people are singing as they walk down the street or hang out the laundry.” And so he took the step of acknowledging that the lyric situation of the show, its song-world, was different and more meaningful. He went in for forthright antirealism. Following Brecht and others, he used vaudeville techniques, film techniques, anything that might make the audience think.

As Cabaret is Winkler’s main exhibit, Chicago, the 1975 stage show with Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera (not the 2002 movie with Renée Zellweger and之 Jones, which Winkler believes that this starts in Sweet Charity, Charity is a “taxi dancer,” a woman who, in a special sort of club, will dance with you for a fee. (This is of course a metaphor for prostitution, and in Nights of Cabiria the heroine is a prostitute. The story was cleaned up for America.) The most interesting number in the show, at least insofar as the 1966 stage version was preserved in the 1969 film version, is “Big Spender,” in which a man enters such a club and confronts the dancers—a row of them, in a fantastic array of wigs and dangle earrings and whatnot—lined up behind a rail, waiting to be chosen. One becks, “Hey, cowboy, you wanna dance?” Another sings her thigh over the rail and asks, “You got a cigarette for me?” Given the practiced coyness of the routine, their smiles, the squatty pliés—they don’t feel sorry for the women. Like so much middle-to-late Fosse, it’s not a representation of sex, but a representation of a representation of sex.

Fosse’s 1972 movie Cabaret shows a similar distancing. Cabaret grew out of Christopher Isherwood’s semi- autobiographical Berlin Stories, as a young tutor of English and Sally Bowles, a woman who, with little talent but great determination, is trying to make a go of it as the headliner in a seedy cabaret, the Kit Kat Klub, in Weimar-era Berlin. The story was later reborn as a play, then as a musical, Cabaret, directed by Hal Prince and set to video the year of the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. (For your reference, over 640 million views in the version currently on YouTube.) Apart from her mastery of detail, Winkler is our best source for what he thinks of as Fosse’s “conceptual staging”—that is, his attack on the fourth wall. Winkler believes that this starts in earnest in Sweet Charity. Charity is a “taxi dancer,” a woman who, in a special sort of club, will dance with you for a fee. (This is of course a metaphor for prostitution, and in Nights of Cabiria the heroine is a prostitute. The story was cleaned up for America.) The most interesting number in the show, at least insofar as the 1966 stage version was preserved in the 1969 film version, is “Big Spender,” in which a man enters such a club and confronts the dancers—a row of them, in a fantastic array of wigs and dangle earrings and whatnot—lined up behind a rail, waiting to be chosen. One becks, “Hey, cowboy, you wanna dance?” Another sings her thigh over the rail and asks, “You got a cigarette for me?” Given the practiced coyness of the routine, their smiles, the squatty pliés—they don’t feel sorry for the women. Like so much middle-to-late Fosse, it’s not a representation of sex, but a representation of a representation of sex.

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