Janet Malcolm on Norman Podhoretz

The New York Review of Books

March 22, 2018 / Volume LXV, Number 5

History Museums in Poland

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Contents

4 Eva Hoffman  Hearing Poland's Ghosts
8 Henri Cole  Poem
10 James Fenton  John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London an exhibition
 at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York City
Catalog of the exhibition edited by Julius Bryant and Susan Weber
14 Jonathan Stevenson  Deception of Duty?
18 Janet Malcolm  Making It by Norman Podhoretz, with an introduction by Terry Teachout
21 J. Hoberman  Phantom Thread a film written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson
23 Freeman Dyson  The Big Bang: An excerpt from Maker of Patterns: An Autobiography Through Letters
25 Josephine Quin  The Landmark Julius Caesar: The Complete Works: Gallic War, Civil War, Alexandrian War, African War, and Spanish War edited and translated from the Latin by Kurt A. Raaflaub
28 John Gray  The Square and the Tower: Networks and Power, from the Freemasons to Facebook
 by Niail Ferguson
30 Laura Kipnis  Men and Apparitions by Lynne Tillman
The Complete Madame Realism and Other Stories by Lynne Tillman
35 Harry Shearer  King Zeno by Nathaniel Rich
37 Avisah Margalit  Knowing the Score: What Sport Can Teach Us About Philosophy
(And What Philosophy Can Teach Us About Sports) by David Papinace
What We Think About When We Think About Soccer by Simon Critchley
41 David S. Reynolds  The Afterlives of Specimens: Science, Mourning, and Whitman's Civil War by Lindsay Tuggle
43 Jason Farago  Jasper Johns: Catalogue Raisonné of Painting and Sculpture by Roberta Bernstein
with Heidi Colman-Frebygger, Caitlin Sweeney, and Betsy Stupna Zinn
Jasper Johns: Redo an Eye by Roberta Bernstein
Catalog of the exhibition edited by Roberta Bernstein
Jasper Johns: Pictures within Pictures, 1980–2015 by Fiona Donovon
45 Letters from Jeremiah Allen, Benjamin M. Friedman, Milton Leitenberg, and Michael Ignatieff
Exclusively in the online edition of this issue at www.nybooks.com

Ian Jack  Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler by Nicholas Rankin
David Luban  Closing the Courthouse Door: How Your Constitutional Rights Became Unenforceable by Erwin Chemerinsky

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The New York Review of Books (ISSN 0022-7504), published 20 times a year, monthly in January, July, August, and September; semi-monthly in February, March, April, May, June, October, November, and December, N.Y.R.E.V.I.S., Inc., 435 Hudson Street, Suite 800, New York, NY 10014-3994. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10014 and at additional offices. Canada Post Corp. Sales Agreement #40100306. Postmaster: Send address changes to The New York Review of Books, P.O. Box 9130, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9310. Subscription services: www.nybooks.com/customer-service, or e-mail nyreview@nybooks.info, or call 800-354-0300 in the U.S., 903-636-1101 elsewhere.

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Plus: personal essays by Lucy McKown, Melissa Chadburn, and Genevieve Fox

– KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred review)
Hearing Poland’s Ghosts

Eva Hoffman

The past, in Poland, is not a foreign country; it is morality drama and passion play, combining high ideology and low tragedy. One recent manifestation of history’s significance has been the creation of several ambitious and architecturally inventive museums that explored events and themes in the past Polish. Since the beginning of this century, four “houses of history” have opened in Warsaw and Gdańsk, attracting many visitors and contributing to the development of neglected neighborhoods. At the same time, the museums have inspired sharp controversies over such topics as freedom of expression, new portrayals of Polish-Jewish history, and interpretations of Polish-Jewish history.

At a time when Poland, with its unexpected hard-right turn and defiance of democratic principles, is once again a matter of European concern, these new museums are the fruit of the post-1989 liberal interregnum, during which Poland underwent an economic recovery and joined the European Union. In addition to honoring the past, they can be seen as announcing Poland’s inclusion in the European Union. They have become newly important in the face of the current government’s attempts to control interpretations of this past—this time from an arch-Presidential standpoint.

No aspect of the Polish past has more highly charged memories and previous significance than the Holocaust. The Polish government has to tell a story more fiercely contested or, for all intents and purposes, unanswerable. The museum erected since the fall of 1989 that the past could be a matter of European concern, these four “houses of history” have open in Warsaw and Gdańsk, attracting many visitors and contributing to the development of neglected neighborhoods. At the same time, the museums have inspired sharp controversies over such topics as freedom of expression, new portrayals of Polish-Jewish history, and interpretations of Polish-Jewish history.

The New York Review
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Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Vol. VII Addendum

In Beauty it is finished, Drawings 1951–2008 exhibition catalogue
as the site not only of Jewish catastrophes but also of an important Jewish culture.

The Polish government's recent introduction of the inflammatory “Holocaust bill” further confirms the need for the kind of complex understanding of history that the museum represents. Responding to a comment about “death camps” in other countries make Poles understandably defensive on behalf of their own, often ignored, history: the campaigns to impress upon non-Jewish and some non-Polish inmates. But the proposed law, which has elicited outraged protests, especially in Israel, is a rather transparent and dangerous attempt to stoke nationalist sentiment at a time when the Polish government, with its version of “illiberal democracy,” is waging a war against the liberal mandate of the European Union.

Dariusz Stola has made an eloquent statement on behalf of the museum, pointing to the Third Republic's proud record of open debate on difficult issues, including the fraught question of Polish participation in the Holocaust and its most painful episodes—such as the massacre of Jewish inhabitants of the town of Jedwabne by their Polish neighbors. He emphasized the need for disseminating knowledge about a complex past rather than stifling discussion through judicial measures. It is to be hoped that his voice, among many others, will help to get the legislation withdrawn or at least meaningfully modified.

The Warsaw Rising Museum addresses an event that outside of Poland is often confused with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In postwar Poland, memories of the uprising contributed to a pervasive sense of grievous historical injustice and to the stubborn opposition to Communist regimes. The uprising was launched in 1944 by the Polish underground resistance movement—the largest in Europe, and working against seemingly impossible odds—in the hope of liberating the capital from the German occupation and thus also averting a Soviet takeover. Instead, the insurgents were defeated after sixty-three days of fighting, during which more than 154,000 people, most of them civilians, lost their lives and Warsaw, fulfilling Hitler's long-standing threat, was to be destroyed by the retreating German army. The Soviet army, following Stalin's cynical orders, stayed on the other side of the Vistula River and waited, in the hope that the city would be destroyed before moving in, then went on to wreak its own mayhem as people often had to be destroyed during the uprising (a subject depicted in Andrzej Wajda's great film Kanal). A theater shows some of the film footage made daily during the uprising and featured each evening in a Warsaw cinema, with commentary provided by the director. There are moving pleas from scholars to Warsaw's population to preserve the cultural heritage of the capital; but also a recording of a Soviet radio broadcast encouraging Poles before the uprising to resist the Nazis, and one of Stalin saying, after the event, “I'm sorry for your people's losses—but the uprising came too early.”

It’s the question of Soviet perfidy that comes up when I ask a young man about an exhibit of an RAF Halifax airplane, which had been shot down as it tried to deliver aid to the insurgents. He explains to me that the Soviets prevented Allied planes from using Soviet airfields, leading to the deaths of many pilots. His well-reasoned answer is given in a tone of almost trembling emotion, difficult to imagine among adolescent visitors to say, the Imperial War Museum, which had been shot to distance themselves from anything resembling militant nationalism. For Oldakowski, the museum shows both the terrible costs of the uprising and the legitimate desire of its participants to win their own freedom at a time when the nation was caught between two totalitarianisms. Perhaps the difficulty of interpreting the museum’s message reflects the difficulty of judging the uprising itself. The museum’s advisory board included historians external to the museum as well as some who admire it. Yet others have suggested that this calamitous episode had the classic outlines of a tragedy—there were no good choices to be made. When I brought this up in conversation with Adam Michnik, the leading Solidarity dissident and a powerful moral voice in post-1989 Poland, he responded with one word: “Shake-speare.”

Poland's wartime history in all its phases demands an exceptional tolerance for ambiguity and an acceptance of moral complexity. Divergent ideas about what constitutes patriotism in contemporary Poland have likewise been at stake in the closely watched struggle between the recently opened Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk and the leaders of the Law and Justice party. Pawel Machewicz, a historian who would become the museum's founding director, first suggested that it was needed in a 2007 newspaper article. He was responding in part to a movement within Germany to create a museum commemorating the expulsions of Germans from Poland and elsewhere at the end of World War II. The emphasis on German victimhood (with accompanying demands for reparations) struck al-
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"Mailer is missed... His gifts of observation and imagination [are] splendid armor for our own time.”
David Denby, Harper’s Magazine

The theme of nonviolent resistance is at the heart of Gdansk’s other new museum: the European Solidarity Center, which opened in 2014. This sturdy, beautiful building, fronted by a glass-and-metal façade, with a lovely garden overlooking the Gdansk shipyard, is both a museum to commemorate one of the world’s few nonviolent revolts and a cultural hub that sponsors discussions and events with participants from all of Europe.

For those who remember following Solidarity’s dramatic progress on the news, some of the images in this comprehensive museum—of the young Lech Walesa being hosted aloft by cheering shipyard workers or the roundtable negotiations that ushered in a bloodless transition to democracy—are nostalgically thrilling. “I am very glad,” the museum’s director Basil Kerski stated, that against the background of heated political conflicts in Poland, ECS is a place of calm, civilized debates, respect for the other. I will frankly admit that, as I observed the rising temperature of political discourse... I was worried that the atmosphere of division will also cross our threshold. I am very happy that this did not happen.

He thinks that there is much to learn today from Solidarity’s inclusive pluralism, which embraced all parts of society, and its capacity to compromise when doing so was necessary to avoid violent conflict. He also points out that by breaking the USSR’s domination over Eastern Europe, Solidarity changed the configuration of the continent—how ever difficult and divisive the conditions of freedom have turned out to be.

As for the future of Poland’s cultural institutions, Kerski says that much depends on what might be called the civic courage of individuals in opposing repressive policies, as well as on the credibility of the European Union. The courage has not been lacking; but the Solidarity Center stands as a reminder that democratic freedom, once in evidence, can make a comeback. The other museums also serve as testimony to the history of a country that has at many critical junctures been crucial to Europe’s fate, and that may yet become one of the testing grounds on which the very idea of Europe succeeds or fails.

BLACK MUSHROOMS

For Seamus Heaney

“Half an inch above the grass, a being hoisted aloft by cheering—...”

—Henri Cole

The entire fungus world is wild and unnatural. In cottony growths on the forest floor, a few spores alight, and, if moisture and food are available, swell and grow into protuberances, with elongating stems and raised caps, gills, and veils. It is not always possible to identify them—white, black, or tan; torn, bruised, or crushed—some with squat fruit-bodies, others lacelike. Even the luxury-loving Romans appreciated their palatal starlight. Sometimes, when I’m suffocating from an atmosphere of constraint within myself, I fry them up in butter, with pepper and salt, and forget where the hurt came from. Instead, I experience desire creating desire, and then some milder version of a love that is temporary and guiltless, as if twigs and bark were giving my life back its own flavor again.

—Henri Cole

Hiroshi Sugimoto  San Francisco  Fraenkel Gallery  fraenkelgallery.com
The Master of Wonder House

James Fenton

John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London

an exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York City, September 15, 2017—January 7, 2018.

Catalog of the exhibition edited by Julius Bryant and Susan Weber. Bard Graduate Center Gallery/ Yale University Press, 80 pp., $70.00

1. Founded in 1993 and operating out of two townhouses on New York’s Upper West Side, Bard Graduate Center has produced an admirable series of exhibitions and scholarly catalogs on subjects in its fields of study: decorative arts, design history, and material culture. Its monographic shows have focused on such figures as William Kent, the architect and pioneer of the English landscape garden; Thomas Hope, the collector of antiquities and definer of Regency design; and Charles Percier, Hope’s equivalent in France, inventor of the Empire style and codesigner of the rue de Rivoli. The catalogs of such exhibitions form an impressive, coherent group—an accumulation of expertise.

Among the surprises springing from the center was a tiny small display in 2013–2014 recording a period in which, while the French textile industry ground to a halt during World War I, an attempt was made in New York to create a new American decorative art not beholden to Europe, using the design language of pre-Columbian America and other “primitive” cultures. To this end, the American Museum of Natural History encouraged fashion designers to study and copy textiles and garments from its extensive holdings, and amateur models were photographed wearing original items from the collections: a Sioux dress with a beaded yoke; a Tungus Siberian reindeer fur and sinew coat; an Ainu bark fiber robe.

Doubletless no great harm was done to the textiles in question. One presumes, however, that today such a use of a museum’s materials—using the museum like a “living closet”would be absolutely taboo.

And not only taboo. The promotion of industrial art and design must rank low on the list of ways a modern anthropological museum wishes to engage with the world. Not so in 1919. Then the AMNH and the Brooklyn Museum joined forces for an exhibition of industrial art that showed what modern looms could produce when inspired by primitive looms and preindustrial design: the taffy silk charmee teagown with Bukharan motifs and the Sunset Fan-Ta-St silk dress with blue davidyev appliqué based on a Nanai fish-skin coat were among the proposals of the wartime ethnic look. “LADY or SQUAW,”declared an advertisement in Women’s Wear, “She Obeyes the Impulse to DRESS UP.”

This concern of cultural institutions to direct and enrich the course of modern manufacture may be traced back to London, to the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the founding of what later became the Victoria and Albert Museum. Many imitations of the V&A sprang up around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which once used to look much more like a museum of manufacture, a look it progressively shed during the last century.

When J. Pierpont Morgan and his son purchased the Hoentschel Collection and donated it to the Met, starting in 1906, one of their major purposes was to make available to the public fine and authentic examples of French decorative art from its greatest period. Georges Hoentschel had run a highly superior business in architectural salavage in Paris, and his collection was a compendium of the best paneling, furniture, frames, and metalwork from the period of Louis XIV to Louis XVI. The idea was that if you wanted to know how the doors in your apartment should look—what kinds of hinges and locks, what kinds of keyhole escutcheons— you could go to the Met, or send your man there, find what you needed, and have it copied. And thus taste would be elevated throughout the city, throughout the country.

To an extent, it worked. Here is Elise de Wolfe, the pioneering interior decorator, in The House in Good Taste (1913):

The workers of today have their eyes opened. They have no excuse for producing unworthy things, when the greatest private collections are loaned or given outright to the museums. The new wing of the Metropolitan Museum in New York houses several fine old collections of furniture, the Hoentschel collection...having been given to the people of New York by Mr. Pierpont Morgan.

In due course, as modernism increasingly prevailed in the world of interior design, this aspect of the Met’s mission was forgotten, and the Hoentschel collection went into storage. There followed what have been called the Wrightsman years, in which the emphasis of the Met’s displays shifted to flawlessly realized and furnished interiors—complete rooms. Never has the ancien régime looked better, and, in fact, highly original, cleaner, than it does in the crepuscular light, and teach Faith, though it may turn darkened eyes for a while to the light, and teach Faith where no Faith was.

Father and son, however, not only hit it off. They worked together, discussing the merits of Italy over the Orient, as it was being written. And indeed the first chapter of Kim features a portrait of Lockwood Kipling, in the form of the white-headed cobra of the Lahore Museum—the “Wonder House,” as the book has it—which receives the Tibetan lama in his office and shows him photographs of the very lamasy he has come from.

Everything in that opening chapter is extraordinarily specific. Rudyard makes it clear that the pilgrimage on which he has been on a mission from the beginning in (though he does not use the term) the Gandharan sculpture section of the Lahore Museum among “the larger figures of the Greeco-Buddhist sculptures done, savants know how long since, by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskillfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch.” There is much detail about Buddhist scripture as it is illustrated in Gandharan relief—so much, indeed, that Lockwood anticipated the details of carving, gilding, weaving, and chasing, and that is not the main point.

In 2013 the Bard Graduate Center was able to borrow items from the Hoentschel Collection in order to mount a revealing exhibition (with the usual outstanding catalog) about Hoentschel as a designer and collector and, it turned out, highly original ceramist.1

The center’s most recent show reprises the theme of the museum in relation to industry and craft. This time the subject was India, and the monographic focus was on John Lockwood Kipling, the father of the poet Rudyard. He was an artist and illustrator, a sculptor, a designer, a museum curator, and, like his son, a journal editor. One is of course at liberty to peer at the Hoentschel collection...having been given to the people of New York by Mr. Pierpont Morgan.


2. Salvaging the Past: Georges Hoentschel and the French Decorative Arts from the Metropolitan Museum of
that Kim would prove difficult for the uninitiated reader. But he thought that was as it should be. There is a respect here for Indian art and philosophy that was far more common among the British at the time.

2.

The story of the British encounter with Indian art and architecture is full of surprising twists. An Italo-French acquaintance—discovered not so long ago that the playwright and architect (of Blenheim Palace and Castle Howard) Sir John Vanbrugh spent a part of the 1680s (his "missing years") in Surat, Gujarat, working for the East India Company, as he is said to have been influenced by the architecture of the local pagodas.

Thomas Babington Macaulay, the historian, went to India in the 1830s to write the Indian Penal Code, but found time to begin the Lays of Ancient Rome (one of the most popular volumes of English poetry ever) in the hill station of Ootacamund. Macaulay looked at the monuments of India and was reminded of Oxford—some of the shabbier colleges, he says. He looked at the rural architecture around Madras and was reminded of the small town of Llanrwst in North Wales (a more difficult comparison to grasp). "There are some signs," he adds, "that the people in these huts have more than the mere necessities of life. The timber over the door is generally carved, and sometimes with a taste and skill that reminded me of the wood-work of some of our fine Gothic Chapels and Cathedrals."

About the villas of Europeans in India, Macaulay makes a pregnant observation:

They are large and sometimes very shewy. But you may see at a glance that they are the residences of people who do not mean to leave them to their children or even to end their own days in them. There is a want of repair—a slovenliness—which marks that the rulers of India are pilgrims and sojourners in the land. You will see a fine portico spoiled by a crack in the plaster which a few rupees would set to rights—gaps in hedges—breaches in the walls—off the hinges, and so on. As no Englishman means to die in India—nobody pays the attention to his dwelling which he would pay to a family house. It is curious that the neatest and most carefully kept houses which I have observed are those of half-casts and Armenians, who mean to end their days here.

If it was true that no Englishman—as an individual—meant to die in India (Macaulay himself got the reputation he finished the Penal Code), the British as a nation were determined to hold on to the subcontinent at all costs—something they demonstrated not only by their thorough suppression of the Uprising or Revolt of 1857–1858 but also by the complete reorganisation of the Indian government in its relation to the Crown.

The shock delivered by the Indian Mutiny (as the British dubbed it) can be sensed in the opening pages of the first lecture in John Ruskin's The Two Paths, which he delivered at the V&OA in 1858–1859, and which Lockwood Kipling would have either heard at the time or read shortly afterward. Ruskin asks his audience how it comes about that a land devoid of visual arts, such as the Scottish Highlands, can produce people of exemplary virtue, while a country notable for its love of sublime ornament and design, India, goes in the opposite direction. He is thinking of the gratitude the British owe to the Scottish regiments in their strous form. To all facts and forms of nature it willfully opposes itself; it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster; it will draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zigzag.

And so the Indians are cut off from all heart knowledge and nature. Instead of piety, and whatever else is fruitful and sound in the Hindu tradition—the great sandstone temple reliefs, architectural elements, the statues of the Indian gods—probably more than anything else inspired a kind of horror in those who cared to look at them. They were idolatrous. There were also other obsessions. Sir George Birdwood, the "Art Referee for the Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum" (1873–1878, reversioned in 1889), wrote as late as 1880 that "the monstrosous shapes of the Puranic [that is, Hindu] deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India.

3.

Lockwood Kipling, born in 1837 into a Methodist family in the North of England, was inspired by a visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851 to become an artist and a craftsman. He served an apprenticeship with a ceramics manufacturer, Pin denham, Bourne and Hattersley of Burton-on-Trent, exactly a household name, and not, one might have thought, in smoke-blackened Stoke-on-Trent, a promising start to an artistic career. Intriguingly, though Kipling was tawdry and unpolished; "he was no example of the fine taste," lockwood Kipling was critical of what had been done to the world's finest assembly of Victorian Gothic architecture, much of it encrusted with sculpture modeled and carved by Kipling and his pupils. Lockwood and Alice had come to take advantage of the boom city, Bombay in the 1860s profited from the blockade of the American South and was growing throughout the use of Indian cotton to the Lancashire mills, as well as Indian opium to China. The couple began their Bombay residence in tents on the Esplanade, and Lockwood Kipling's start in life was not so odd for an aspiring artist.

Architectural sculpture, ceramic and stone reliefs, and all kinds of ornamental work were required on the grand public buildings that were going up in Britain and in the British Empire: Gothic buildings, French and Italian renaissance buildings, buildings of a strange, exuberant eclecticism, with Venetian façades and metal structures resembling tram sheds or railway stations. One such was the South Kensington Museum itself. As recently as 1982, when John Physick wrote his history of the museum, "it is possible to explain why Lockwood's portrait, in mosaic, is included on the original front entrance in a procession of dignitaries. The answer is that Kipling had helped Godfrey Sykes model most of the terra-cotta decoration of the exterior, but that somehow it had slipped from the record.

Kipling and his wife, Alice, were both of Methodist stock, and both came to reject the religion of their upbringing—Alice with a memorable gesture. The English lady, identifiably lady, came upon a lock of John Wesley's hair—a pious souvenir of the great preacher. This she "triumphantly" threw in the fire, with the daily offensive words: "See! a hair of the dog that bit us." She was "artistic"—a term then used for women who dressed somewhat unconventionally) and related to Edward Burne-Jones and to another painter less well known today but in his time highly successful, Edward Poynder. She was "artistic," lockwood Kipling thought, but she seems to have been ambitious, like her husband, and going to India, as a young pregnant wife, was perhaps a sign of that ambition. But in Bombay and Lahore she was also often obscure in what she might actually do. She was wittily and on occasion referred to as 'sour. Those who liked the Kiplings seemed to like the Kiplings. Others found something unpleasant in their company—something no doubt to do with the frustrations of class.

In India, when the Kiplings arrived in 1865, the buildings that had once struck Macaulay as being so ill-kept had been newly Palladian in design. But after the Revolt of 1857 the new style for the public buildings in Bombay was Gothic, and the Bard college talked to us "still, today, Mumba can boast the world's finest assembly of Victorian Gothic architecture, much of it encrusted with sculpture modeled and carved by Kipling and his pupils. Lockwood and Alice had come to take advantage of the boom city, Bombay in the 1860s profited from the blockade of the American South and was growing throughout the use of Indian cotton to the Lancashire mills, as well as Indian opium to China. The couple began their Bombay residence in tents on the Esplanade, and Lockwood Kipling's start in life was not so odd for an aspiring artist. Architectural sculpture, ceramic and stone reliefs, and all kinds of ornamental work were required on the grand public buildings that were going up in Britain and in the British Empire: Gothic buildings, French and Italian renaissance buildings, buildings of a strange, exuberant eclecticism, with Venetian façades and metal structures resembling tram sheds or railway stations. One such was the South Kensington Museum itself. As recently as 1982, when John Physick wrote his history of the museum, "it is possible to explain why Lockwood's portrait, in mosaic, is included on the original front entrance in a procession of dignitaries. The answer is that Kipling had helped Godfrey Sykes model most of the terra-cotta decoration of the exterior, but that somehow it had slipped from the record. Kipling and his wife, Alice, were both of Methodist stock, and both came to reject the religion of their upbringing—Alice with a memorable gesture. The English lady, identifiably lady, came upon a lock of John Wesley's hair—a pious souvenir of the great preacher. This she "triumphantly" threw in the fire, with the daily offensive words: "See! a hair of the dog that bit us." She was "artistic"—a term then used for women who dressed somewhat unconventionally) and related to Edward Burne-Jones and to another painter less well known today but in his time highly successful, Edward Poynder. She was "artistic," lockwood Kipling thought, but she seems to have been ambitious, like her husband, and going to India, as a young pregnant wife, was perhaps a sign of that ambition. But in Bombay and Lahore she was also often obscure in what she might actually do. She was wittily and on occasion referred to as 'sour. Those who liked the Kiplings seemed to like the Kiplings. Others found something unpleasant in their company—something no doubt to do with the frustrations of class.

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New York Review of Books III.18

March 22, 2018
himself contributed (such as the market fountain in Bombay closely modeled on one designed by Burges for the city of Gloucester). By contrast, when in due course Lockwood moved on to Lahore to head an art school and museum there, he sought to pioneer a style based on local traditions. One of his chief concerns was the preservation or revival of Indian artistic practices. “It is on the architecture of today,” he argued, “that the preservation of Indian art in any semblance of healthy life now hinges.” To this end he not only collected Indian arts and crafts. He also drew charming studies of craftsmen at work. One feature of the Lahore museum that caused great interest among visitors was a series of small models of such craftsmen, accurate in all details of their trade. Lockwood was concerned to find markets for Indian work, and made sure that it was represented in the kind of international fair that had sprung up after the model of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Had he not devoted so much time to this educational and administrative work, he could easily have made a living as a sculptor. He had a particular gift for working in relief (the catalog suggests that was influenced by the Donatello at the V&A), and sought new ways of using it. So the illustrations to Kim were modeled in plaster relief and then photographed—an original combination of media.

It is astonishing to me how much has been retrieved by the scholars involved in this enterprise. As the Raj recedes it loses perhaps just a little of its toxicity. It has become possible to take a closer look at Rudyard Kipling and that closer look often includes Lockwood Kipling in the frame. Then the father becomes interesting for his own sake—something the son would never, it seems, have resented. One cannot help wondering how many comparable figures are waiting for such an unexpected revival. 

**Dereliction of Duty?**

Jonathan Stevenson

After President Trump fired former Army general Michael Flynn as national security adviser in February 2017, hope reigned that his replacement, Army Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, would bring order and professionalism to the vital office that Flynn—who has since pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his activities as national security adviser designate—had abused. To generate sound policy, the interagency process led by the national security adviser requires the collegial consideration of a generous range of official viewpoints and perspectives.

Flynn had been unlikely to foster that kind of open conversation. He was a shrill Islamophobe and right-wing ideologue who tolerated no disagreement and recruited acolytes he had groomed in previous active-service positions. Under Flynn’s supervision, the National Security Council would have become a crude vehicle for a far-right agenda. This was in evidence almost immediately, when Trump’s executive order banning citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries from traveling to the US was issued without even being vetted by the State, Defense, or Homeland Security Departments.

As an active-duty soldier, McMaster probably felt compelled to accept the job out of deference to the commander-in-chief—whoever he or she was. His rationale—or at least his rationalization—was likely that the position would best be filled by a warrior-scholar with the spine and rectitude to protect the country against Trump’s rash leadership. No doubt he also found irresistible the opportunity to advance from something of a military backwater—he was then deputy commander of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command and director of its Army Capabilities Integration Center—to one of the most important jobs in the executive branch.

McMaster had performed brilliantly in the first Gulf War, earning a Silver Star for gallantry in leading a tank assault that destroyed a much larger Iraqi tank, including Star for gallantry in leading a tank assault that destroyed a much larger Iraqi tank, earning a Silver Star for gallantry in leading a tank as-

the post a “shit sandwich” and implicitly anticipating the frustration of dealing with an incurious, heedless, and peremptory commander-in-chief. He got it right. In early March, McMaster told Trump in a Fox News interview that he was “the only one that matters” in US foreign policy. The results are clear: a “trained dog” approach to foreign policy uninformed by deliberation; the reflexive and vindictive purging of Barack Obama’s legacies in US policy, regime enmity and not subject to Senate confirmation, established by the National Security Act of 1947 as “civilian executive secretary” and not subject to Senate confirmation, it remained a relatively modest bureau- cratic post until the Kennedy adminis- tration, when McGeorge Bundy shaped the response to the Cuban missile crisis and Vietnam policy. The national security adviser now has an office in the West Wing and greater access to the president than the secretary of state or the secretary of defense.2

Under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger elevated the post to its highest level of authority, wresting bureaucratic power from Secretary of State William Rogers until Kissinger himself replaced him. During Jimmy Carter’s tenure, Zbigniew Brzezinski ultimately gained primacy over Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. In Reagan’s administration, in the po- sition got a bad name when Robert McFarlane and then John Poindexter went rogue, using the NSC to forge the illegal Iran-contra arms arrangement. But by the time Ronald Reagan’s national security Frank Carlucci and Colin Powell had restored the job’s discipline and standing. During the George H. W. Bush ad- ministration, Scowcroft consolidated that effort, reemphasizing consensus and coordination and respecting oper- ational departments. While Anthony Lake, Bush’s first national security adviser, became a discreet policy entrepreneur, both he and his succes- sor, Sandy Berger, followed Scowcroft’s lead in emphasizing collegiality and process. Narrowly conceiving of her job as George W. Bush’s agent and tutor, Condoleezza Rice failed to coordinate policy and action. But Stephen Hadley, her successor, significantly improved the Scowcroftian focus on implementing policy execution.3

During Obama’s presidency, after Janes Jones’s brief and rather inert tenure, Tom Donilon and Susan Rice approached the job like Scowcroft


and Hadley, though they were sensi- tized to their boss’s preference for con- trolling foreign policy from the White House. Obama’s NSC, which essen- tially laid out the foreign policy agenda for the State and Defense Departments to implement, opened the White House to occasionally justified charges of mi- cromanagement and micromanaged. But the larger reality was that interna- tional affairs had become too complex and the news cycle too fast to allow US foreign policy to proceed without cen- tralized, top-down supervision. The merits of this approach were mani- fest in a number of accomplishments and initiatives, including the killing of Osama bin Laden, the strategic rebal- ancing toward Asia, and, perhaps most notably, the negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal.

Flynn represented an abrupt retro- gression to the Reagan-era ignominy of the NSC, doing McFarlane and Poindexter one better (or worse) in seeking to use the office illegally as much for personal gain as for strate- gic advantage. McMaster quite rightly wanted to distinguish himself starkly from Flynn. Certainly the Iran-contra affair demonstrated the costs of the NSC’s “going operational” by skirting policy- implementing agencies, not to mention congressional oversight. But since the NSC had redeemed itself in subsequent administrations, McMaster had abundant precedents to support a case for making the NSC’s process of forming and implementing policy more systematic.

At the outset, he appeared deter- mined to do so. He reportedly insisted on and got a free hand in staffing prior to accepting the post. Trump initially reneged on the deal, but McMaster persevered. He excluded Bannon from the NSC Principals Committee within a few weeks, and K.T. McFarland, the unqualified deputy national security adviser, within a couple of months.

After four months, having struggled to be included by Senior Adviser Jared Kushner, Bannon, and Trump him- self, McMaster threw out Ezra Cohen- Wattnick, the egregiously inexperienced NSC senior director for intelligence and a Flynn protégé who had improperly interceded in the House Intelligence Committee’s investigation of Trump’s connections with Russia. McMaster

2Flew an apparent retrow- gression to the Reagan-era ignominy also fired Rich Higgins, the NSC senior director for strategic planning, for writ- ing and circulating a hysterical memo that warned about the depredations of a chimerical “deep state,” and Derek Harvey, the senior director for the Middle East, for circumventing NSC procedures. More substantially, he prevailed on Trump to grudgingly con- firm the United States’ commitment to NATO and efficiently marshaled the NSC process of laying out options for US military response to genocide against the Syrian regime in retaliation for chemi- cal weapons attacks.

All the while, it was becoming clear that Trump preferred to make policy extemporaneously, via unfiltered Twit- ter venting and other emotive public statements. Last March, for instance, upon reading in a Breitbart News re- port that the Obama administration had ordered surveillance on Trump Tower, he tweeted his alarm rather than turning to the NSC for informa-


7The National Security Council at 70: Charting the Future of America’s Security,” Center for Strategic and Inter-
While paying lip service to a “historical perspective”—several former national security advisers participated in the discussion—McMaster was actually using the occasion of the administration’s vaunted evisceration of the “administrative state” to the vanquished object of a hostile takeover, which he boasted of shrinking. There are two fundamental flaws in the policy bureaucracies: the State Department, which is primarily responsible for diplomacy, and the Defense Department, which handles the military. And it is the day-to-day business of foreign policy is mainly diplomatic, the principal agency to which McMaster planned to redelegate responsibility would be the State Department.

Yet Trump, via Tillerson, has systematically emptied and disempowered those who is gutting the most important state department. McMaster has reported that, just as Tillerson’s machinations—the move is also military military—has led to the Pentagon—the primary executing bureaucracy head fully standing after Trump’s dismissal of the vanquished—and the day-to-day business of foreign policy is mainly diplomatic, the principal agency to which McMaster planned to redelegate responsibility would be the State Department.

McMaster could have used NSC precedent for preserving its authority over policy, but he has declined to do so. In his book, he criticized the imbalance between political and military considerations in the way Vietnam-era policy was made. McMaster prefers generals who spoke up in NSC meetings and pushed back against tendentious political distortions that civilian officials might make to what was actually required to attain American policy objectives. As national security adviser, he is ideally positioned to encourage that sort of spirited collaboration. Yet he is working for an unfit president: McMaster privately characterized him as a “kindergartener” at a corporate dinner that same month.

Indeed, lack of coordination at the G20 summit in July, which McMaster felt duty-bound to accept his present post and was grateful for an opportunity to cap a brilliant but bumptious Army career with a move that amounted to a fourth star. Being constrained by the president’s viewpoint is of course part of the job description. McMaster was aware of this going in. But he also apparently recognizes that he is working for an unfit president: McMaster should know better than to take the job and then refrain from dereliction of duty. For him is working for an unfit president: McMaster should know better than to take the job and then refrain from dereliction of duty.

Until mid-February, McMaster had not pushed back on Trump’s dismissal of the issue of Russian interference with the 2016 presidential election for fear of offending him. Then, after the Justice Department indicted thirteen Russians for such interference on February 16, McMaster angered Trump by finally stating publicly, at a major security conference in Munich, that the evidence was “incontrovertible.” Whether Trump persists in courting Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, as political cover for Trump’s chummy relationship with Putin, to the consternation of close allies. The national security adviser has also bolstered Trump’s denials of collusion with Russia, stating implausibly that Trump’s job security “doesn’t even come up” in conversations with those allies.

McMaster publicly admitted that Trump had no agenda for an ostensibly important private meeting with Putin at the G20 summit in July, which McMaster did not attend; urging and crafting such an agenda is a prime function of the NSC. In this light, the new National Security Strategy approved by McMaster, which blithely heralds the revival of the cold war, reads, at least in part, as political cover for Trump’s chumminess with Putin. Deliberately removed from the strategy were references to global climate change as a threat to national security—even though the military is worried about it and plans for its operational impact—to placate Trump’s ideological, anti-science dystopian base.

In Delerection of Duty, McMaster was particularly indignant that the president would be guided by domestic considerations in prosecuting foreign policy. His outrage was to some extent naive or disingenuous: all wartime presidents have been transparently influenced by domestic concerns. But the central point is that McMaster used to be committed to minimizing the political skewing of foreign policy, which requires vigorous consultation at the NSC. As national security adviser, he has abandoned that commitment and channeled Trump’s “Make America Great Again” jingoism.

It is normal and human that McMaster felt duty-bound to accept his present post and was grateful for an opportunity to cap a brilliant but bumptious Army career with a move that amounted to a fourth star. Being constrained by the president’s viewpoint is of course part of the job description. McMaster was aware of this going in. But he also apparently recognizes that he is working for an unfit president: McMaster should know better than to take the job and then refrain from dereliction of duty.


Making It
by Norman Podhoretz, with
an introduction by Terry Teachout.
New York Review Books, 254 pp., $17.95 (paper)
Norman Podhoretz’s memoir Making It
remains a reliable starting point when
it came out in 1967. It struck a chord of
hostility in the mid-twentieth-century
literary world that was out of all pro-
portion to the literary sins it may or
may not have committed. The reviews
were not just negative, but mean. In
what may have been the meanest re-
view of all, Wilfred Sheed, a prominent
critic and novelist of the time, wrote:

In this mixture of complacency and
agitation, he has written a book of
no literary distinction whatever,
pockmarked by clichés and little
mock modesties and a woefully pe-
destrian tone…. Mediocrities from
cost to coast will no doubt take
Making It to their hearts and will
use it for their own justification…. In
the present condition of our so-
ciety and the world, I cannot imag-
ine a more feckless, silly book.

Even before the book was published
it was an object of derision. Podhoretz’s
friends urged him not to publish it, and
his publisher shrank from it after read-
ing the manuscript. Another publisher
gaily took the book, but his gam-
ble did not pay off. Word had spread
throughout the literary world about the
god-awfulness of what Podhoretz
had wrought. This and the reviews
sealed the book’s fate. It was a total hu-
militating failure.

Making It was reissued last year by
New York Review Books as one of its
Classics, and the literary world—per-
haps because it no longer exists—re-
mained calm. Bookish people didn’t
call each other up to exclaim about the
scandal. Not many reviews appeared.
And yet among those that did were
some that in their nastiness might have
been taken in 1967. James Wolcott’s
review in the London Review of Books
was the longest and nastiest. It began
with a quote from an entry in Alfred
Kazin’s journal of 1963, in which Kazin
wrote of a party he attended at the
offices of Commentary magazine, of
which Podhoretz was editor:

Struck by the oatiness of Norman
Pod, drunkenly crowning in the en-
trance to the elevator. That lovely,
blond girl (wife of the publisher of
the NY Review?) looked really off-
fended, and I couldn’t blame her.

Wolcott’s decision to begin his put-
down of Making It with an image of
his author as a boorish jerk, taken
from a text written years before the book’s
publication, may help answer the ques-
tion of its original outlandish unpopu-
laritv. It illustrates a glaring problem of
the autobiographical genre, namely its
susceptibility to influences outside the
text. At the time of the memoir’s first
publication Podhoretz was a well-known
but not universally well thought of figure
in the New York literary establishment.
He had been writing for Commentary,
Partisan Review, and The New Yorker
since the 1950s, when he was still in his
twenties, and had become editor of
Commentary in 1960 at the age of thirty.
He was a kind of magnet for malice. A
famous miscuevous story going around
was that Lauren Bacall was supposed to
have said when he introduced himself to
her at a cocktail party: “Fuck off, boy.”

What was Edwin Frank, the editor
of New York Review Books, thinking
when he decided to reprint Making It?
Had he seen virtues in the book
that the fog of schadenfreude had ob-
called him to distinguish from his
creator, Podhoretz—is not the conven-
tional chauvinizing who doesn’t belong
with the Muggles he has been set down
among. He is content with his lot. He is
bookish and precocious, yes, but being
the smartest boy in the class doesn’t
ruin his life. “By the age of thirteen
I had made it into the neighborhood big
time, otherwise known as the Chero-
kees, S.A.C. [social athletic club],” he
says with modest pride, and adds:

It had by no means been easy for
me, as a mediocre athlete and a no-

commit against my parents and asking
me to participate in,” Norman recalls.

Oh no, I said in a panic (suddenly
realizing that I wanted her to buy
me that suit), I can’t, my mother
wouldn’t like it. “You can tell her it’s
a gift from Grandma.” Or else I
will tell her. If I tell her, I’m sure
she won’t object.” The idea of Mrs.
K. meeting my mother was more
than I could bear: my mother,
who spoke with a Yiddish accent
and of whom, until that sickening
moment, I had never known I was
ashamed and so ready to betray.

Norman somehow slides away from
the betrayal; the suit is not bought. He later reflects:

Looking back now at the story of
my relationship with Mrs. K.…

What strikes me most sharply is
the astonishing rudeness of this
woman, who was filled with so
much of such overriding concern.… Were
her “good” manners derived from or conducive
to a greater moral sensitivity than the “bad”
manners I had learned at home
and on the streets of Brownsville?

Did she win the Harvard scholarship—at the interview he wore
a suit handed down from an uncle—but
went to Columbia instead because it of-
fered a more generous scholarship; the
family could not afford the extra ex-
penses. While at Columbia Norman lived at home, trav-
eling more than two hours by subway
daily, and “I, to all appearances, the
same kid I had been before enter-
ing Columbia.” Yet

we all knew that things were not the
same. I knew that the neigh-
borhood voices were beginning to
sound coarse and raucous; I knew that
our apartment was beginning
to look tastel ess and tawdry. I knew
that the m g had come to me from my
friends and I ho rily roamed the
streets were beginning to strike me
as too elaborately made up, too
shitty in their dres s…. It was the lower-
classness of Brownsville to which
I was responding with irritation.…

What did it matter that I genuinely
loved my mother as a child and
when not even love had the power
to protect them from the ruthless
judgments of my newly delicate,
oh-so-delicate, oh-so-delicate sensibilities? What
did it matter that I was still naive
enough and cowardly enough and
even decent enough to pretend
that my conversion to “culture”

Janet Malcolm

‘I Should Have Made Him for a Dentist’

The New York Review
Your show is a wonderful reminder of how accessible the arts are in N.Y.C.—and makes me want to discover more!

—Miriam F., NYC-ARTS viewer

Thursdays at 8P on THIRTEEN
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Streaming on NYC-ARTS.ORG
had nothing to do with class when I had already traveled so far along the road Mrs. K. had predicted I would.

“I should have made him for a dentist,” Norman’s mother murmurs to herself at a moment of special incomprehension of her boy’s new ways.

It was at Columbia that Norman was bitten by the crazy ambition that was to become a sort of signature. For the first time he was not automatically the smartest boy in the class. In his freshman year he had to struggle just to keep up, and even then he knew his way was only to begin first. He attributes the excesses of his competitiveness to a realization:

My hunger for success as a student, which was great enough in itself but might yet have yielded to discipline, became absolutely uncontrollable when I began to realize that I would never make the grade as a poet…. The truth was that I could not bear the idea of not being great.

Norman won his way to the academic top by being weirdly energized by exams and by an unaccountably uncanny ability to write papers in the styles of the professors for whom they were written. Not only A’s but A-’s poured in as a result of these aptitudes. He was not liked by a lot of his fellow students, but he didn’t care. He cared only that the professors liked him. In his final year he took a course with Lionel Trilling, who was determined not to be taken in by this famous know-it-all. But Trilling was won over by the exceptional quality of Norman’s academic performance. He, too, gave him an A-.

Trilling and his wife, Diana, became friends of Norman’s after his graduation, and Trilling was to provide an important link to the literary world outside the academy by introducing him to Elliott Cohen, the editor of Commentary. But Norman’s entrance into that world was delayed by another academic triumph. After graduation from Columbia he went to England, as the recipient of the Kellett Fellowship to Clare College at Cambridge University. Getting the coveted Kellett did not further endear Norman to his classmates, as he unaccountably notes:

He recalls the pleasures of a room of his own, with early morning tea brought by a servant. He notes that this was the first time in his life he had the leisure to read for the sake of the work rather than to show someone how clever he was. In the English system the tutor for whom he wrote a weekly paper had no influence on the outcome of the exam he would take at the end of two years. Sucking up to him served no purpose.

[He] was the best possible antidote I could have found to the frenetic pursuit of “brilliance” to which I had become habituated at Columbia and whose imperatives constituted a fearfarm of the soul being largely internal, than any that could conceivably have been imposed upon me from the outside.

However:

There was, as usual, another side to the story. Worlds apart from the Cambridge of Clare was the Cambridge of Downing College, and if the fires within me were banked at Clare, to Downing I came; burning, burning, even more hotly than before: burning to learn, burning to impress, burning to succeed. Downing was the college of F. R. Leavis’s most scathing criticism in England—the editor of the country’s most formidable critical review, the terrifying Scrutiny.

Norman wins the heart of the fanatical Leavis as he had won those of his predecessors at Columbia. He is older (twenty-one) and “no longer so unformed” as the captive of imitation of the master’s style in the papers I wrote.” But his more subtle fawning succeeds beyond his dreams:

Leavis invites him to write for Scrutiny, and prints the piece. Norman can’t help being Norman. Here as throughout the book Podhoretz writes about his hero with a finely judged mixture of affection and mockery. He knows as well as his critics that Norman’s ambitiousness verges on the insane. But such is the power of Podhoretz’s storytelling that we continue to want to follow the fortunes of his peculiar hero even as our sense of his peculiarity grows.

To complicate matters, Podhoretz has encased the story of Norman’s feverish strivings—the way chocolate en cases the soft center of a bonbon—in a rather puzzling polemic about a social problem that not many readers will recognize as such, much less want to carry on about. His idea is that American culture is dominated by a doctrine of “anti-success” that keeps successful people in a perpetual state of nervous guilt over the “corruption of spirit” that underlies their power, riches, and fame. “On the one hand,” he writes, “our culture teaches us to shape our lives in accordance with the hunger for worldly things; on the other hand, it spitefully contrives to make us ashamed of the presence of those hungers in ourselves and to deprive us as far as possible of any pleasure in their satisfaction.”

This said—and how well he says it—Podhoretz goes on to describe his hero’s conquest of literary New York as anything but the angst-ridden experience we would expect it to be, given his thesis. We follow Norman’s campaign to gain acceptance into “the family”—the mostly but by no means exclusively Jewish intellectuals associated with Partisan Review—with the sort of interest we reserve for favorite sports teams. We are rooting for him even as (with Podhoretz’s good-natured permission) we are laughing at him. Commentary gave him his start, assigning him monthly book reviews. “What I wanted was to see my name in print, to be praised, and above all to attract attention.” But it was the attention of the family I most dreamed of arousing…. There was nothing I loved better than to sit around with [Robert] Warshow and [Claude] Greenberg and listen (my wide-eyed worshipful fascination egging them on) to tales of the patriarchal past: how

Mary had left “Philip” to marry Edmund Wilson…how “Dwight” had once organized nude swimming parties at the Cape, how “William” had really felt about “Delmore,” and how “Isaac” really felt about “Saul.” Oh to be granted the right to say “William” and “Philip” and “Dwight” and “Isaac” and “Saul” and “Bob” and “Clem” and “Nat.”

The right was granted in due course. The Partisan Review people began noticing him and soon gave him a book to review: Saul Bellow’s The Adventures of Augie March. Norman’s luck held: his dislike of the book, against the prevalent view that it was great, turned out to be the view that a lot of the family secretly held. There is a momentary hint of a party at Philip Rahv’s apartment that Norman characterized as the bar mitzvah ceremony that admitted him into the family. He got very drunk. “I remember hearing my voice pronounce an incredible, ‘You mean Alfred Kazin?’ or ‘You mean Dwight Macdonald?’ or ‘You mean Mary McCarthy?’ as Rahv and a woman who was present treated me to my first horrified experience of true family-style gossip.” After the party Norman stood on the street violently throwing up. “And yet in the midst of all that misery, I knew that I had never been so happy in my life.”

A few months later Norman was drafted into the army and didn’t enjoy basic training, but it was only after his release from the army that he became “more unhappy than I had ever been in my life” in a job as an editor at Commentary that had been promised to him by Elliot Cohen before he left for Fort Dix. By the time Norman came to do this the country was no longer the place he had known when he had hung out with the editors and heard about Dwight’s nude swimming parties and how they had been rubbernecking at a mental institution. All of its former subeditors were gone except for two men who now jointly ran the place. They welcomed Norm into their midst. They undermined and bullied him.

Podhoretz does not name the men but combines them into a character called “The Boss” who was determined not to be taken in by any famous know-it-all. But Trilling was to become a sort of signature. For Podhoretz, the character Trilling represented was made to feel like a pathetic incompetent. Finally he couldn’t take it anymore and quit the job, but not before getting into the offices of the American Jewish Council—the organization that owned Commentary—and telling the head of its personnel department why he was quitting. The result was a great upheaval that ended the autocratic reign of “The Boss” and allowed Norman to continue in the job as one of three equal editors. Norman asks himself: “In thus committing the prime crime of American boyhood, snitching to the authorities, did I feel guilty? A little, but mostly I felt pleased for having acted so selflessly, so nobly.” Here as elsewhere Norman keeps the reader on his side by telling the story on himself. He has no illusions about the dirtiness of what he did. We helplessly admire his honesty, as the women in his childhood

marveled at my cleverness, quoting the right song with the right words and the right tone and being loved by someone other and even back to me (“You remember what you said that time when I was here last? Let me hear you say it again.”). They called me adding up, they held me in reverence. They called me a genius, and predicted a great future for me: a doctor at the very least I would be.

They probably would not have predicted his politics. Soon after writing Making It Podhoretz veered sharply right (until then he was a regular lefty like most of the rest of the family) and has grown ever more firmly committed to right-wing causes. He has written numerous books about his extreme right-wing politics, more than a few more than any other of the leakages from life that give autobiography its wobbly ontological status. Podhoretz’s radical post-publication politics hover over the book he wrote when he was an innocuous liberal. My attempt to seal it off from its author’s later career, and to write as if I didn’t know what I know—and everyone else who knows the name norman podhoretz knows—was made in the name of the New Critical ideal of textual fidelity: don’t muddy the waters with extraneous information. In the case of Making It, however, the mud clinging to the tale of the strange ambivalent boy may be crucial to its discreet charm.
The House of Anderson

J. Hoberman

Phantom Thread

a film written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson

“I find it comforting to think that the dead are watching over the living,” Daniel Day-Lewis happily confides to a new acquaintance, standing before the writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson’s Phantom Thread. It’s an odd thing to say to a young woman whom he seemingly plans to seduce, particularly since Byrnes, his old flame, is now his wife.

Phantom Thread, which stars the always remarkable Day-Lewis as Reynolds Woodcock, a domineering master couturier in mid-20th-century Britain, has been characterized by many reviewers as a love story. It is that, being concerned largely with the complicated relationship between Woodcock and a young woman who serves him as a mannequin, studio assistant, and sometime accomplice. But it is also a faux Hollywood melodrama, a gothic fantasy, an anti-authoritarian fable, and an absorption, a discreetly kinky case history, a chamber piece, a study in artistic self-absorption, a discreetly kinky case history, an anti-authoritarian fable, and (as Anderson himself has suggested) a fairy tale.

For a movie about fashion, Phantom Thread is triumphantly unfashionable. In one comic bit of business, Reynolds jants about the use of the term “chic,” spitting out “that filthy little word” as though it were an expletive or an olive pit. At once pohs and spectral, the film luxuriates in fustiness and it may be a prima donna, but he is still the servant of an established order, producing the emperor’s old clothes. The House of Woodcock’s wealthy and aristocratic clientele are not dressed so much as they are gloriously shrouded or upholstered by Reynolds in capes and bodices worthy of Walt Disney’s Snow White. I was less impressed with his designs than convinced of his particular genius and that of Anderson, whose robust, enveloping visual style is predicated on unsu-

ually close close-ups, subtly skewed compositions, suavely disjunctive editing, usually close close-ups, subtly skewed compositions, suavely disjunctive editing, and judicious camera movement.

The author of eight disparate and venturous features, Anderson has, according to the preeminent Hollywood filmmaker of his generation, Anderson is an ambitious director with a taste for ambitious characters: the self-made tycoons and self-appointed prophets of What Will Be Blood (2007), the cult leaders and salesmen in The Master (2012) and Magnolia (1999), the would-be movie star of Boogie Nights (1997). Not the least of his aspirations would seem to be reviving the crowd-pleasing style of the late 1940s and early 1950s that pro-

claimed the end of wartime rationing. Austerity is over; tasteful excess is permissible for those who can afford it.

Unlike many American directors, Anderson does not seem fascinated with genres. Nor does he choose to make topical films. (Most of his features have been period pieces.) Rather, his character-driven, densely plotted yet elusive movies appear to address his most formidable forebears—Mar
tin Scorsese and Robert Altman to start with, later Orson Welles and Stan
ey Kubrick, and, in Phantom Thread, Alfred Hitchcock. Anderson might be explained in terms of Harold Bloom’s ideas regarding the “anxiety of influence,” as a “strong poet” staking his claim to historical significance by “misreading” or challenging his strong precursors. This inclination to go up against the big guns is reinforced by the difficult father–son relationships found in many of his films, most of which are ambiguous moral fables of abusive power and personal realization.

Anderson grew up in a show business family. His father, Ernie Anderson, was a disc jockey and TV personality who, among other things, was the hip
stic host of a Cleveland horror movie show, Shock Theater, under the name Ghouliard. Paul made video movies as a teenager and briefly attended film school, supposedly dropping out of NYU after a few days. His first feature, Hard Eight (1996), a crime film remi

niscient of Scorsese, remains his most conventional movie—an exercise in gangster existentialism in which a dappled criminal is essentially no more than himself, Anderson treats the rise and fall of an adult entertainment star as an allegory of Hollywood cinema and the inevitable advent of video technology.

Magnolia, completed before Anderson turned thirty, is based on another creative misreading, Anderson took Robert Altman’s ensemble film Short Cuts, a portrait of contemporary Los Angeles composed of multiple intersecting stories, for an apocalyptic work. Where Altman was judgmental of his characters, Anderson subjected his to something like the Last Judgment, complicating their respective destinies with a time-bending parallel montage (a nod to D.W. Griffith’s Intolerance) and ending his Los Angeles saga with a full-scale Old Testament plague.

Anderson’s mature films, What Will Be Blood and The Master, have intimations of Welles in their outsized protagonists as well as of Kubrick in the director’s own detached precision. An evocation of frontier capitalism set at the dawn of the twentieth century, There Will Be Blood draws on the first few chapters of Upton Sinclair’s 1920s best seller Oil! to recount the tale of a ferociously successful wildcat oil driller (Day-Lewis, who won an Oscar for his performance) who has been misreading the archetypal movie tycoon Charles Fos
ter Kane, Day-Lewis’s ruthless loner, Daniel Plainview, deserves to have his name followed by the epithet “Americ

can.” The same is true of Lancaster Dodd in The Master, another char

ismatic, flawed tyrant, in some ways modeled after the inventor of Scientol

ogy, L. Ron Hubbard. There Will Be Blood and The Master, together with Phantom Thread, constitute a trilogy of megabudget spectacles for a self-aware movie director. In his New York Times review of Phantom Thread, A. O. Scott called the film “ex-

traordinary, visually and graphically. Not directly, perhaps: unlike the autocrats of There Will Be Blood and The Master, Phantom Thread’s tyr

ant is an artist.

Daniel Plainview and Lancaster Dodd have tortured symbiotic rela-

tionships with their male rivals or disciples. Reynolds Woodcock—said to have been inspired in part by the eccentric, high-strung Anglo-American designer Charles James—is romantically involved with his female foil, Alma (Vicky Krieps), a young woman of unspecified foreign origin whom he discovers waiting on tables in a rural inn. Here and there, not only because it is Spanish for “soul” but also because it belonged to the wife and close collaborator of Alfred Hitchcock, whose first American project, the 1940 gothic romance Rebecca, Anderson has cited, along with the supremely fetishistic Vertigo, as a point of refer-

tence for this film. Phantom Thread is framed as Alma’s story, told by the fireside to a sympathetic doctor who, as we will learn much later, is treating Reynolds—although, in keeping with Anderson’s inexorable structure, it includes several scenes, mainly flashbacks, that Alma could not have observed or necessarily even known about.

Speaking to the camera, with her lis
tener offscreen, Alma ecstatically ex

presses her deep love for Reynolds, the man who has made her “dreams come true,” and also, she proudly declares, “the most demanding” of men. Her per

fectionism is illustrated with a montage of his morning routine—his fastidious toilete as a small army of seamstresses and tailors converging on his Fitz

rovia townhouse to be greeted by the imperious Cyril (Lesley Manville), his sister and business manager, whom he calls “my old careless” (as in “saw and sew”). The orchestrated roman

tic music washing over this daily rit

ual seems based on variations of the shmilat ballad “My Foolish Heart.”

As the persimmon Reynolds takes his breakfast, which he eats while concentra-

ting head-down over a drawing, his current inamorata presses him to try one more trick. What she has ordered. Reynolds’s care and feed

ing is an important theme in Phantom Thread. Pushing the pastry on him is a grave faux pas, even worse for being committed under Cyril’s vigilant gaze. Manville, who has often played softer roles in the films of Mike Leigh, is here haughtily perched in all her scenes, as watchful and unsubtly but not inappropriately given a royal-sounding masculine name, she functions as Reynolds’s pr""
The Master

More willing than Reynolds to acknowledge the importance of collaboration, Anderson has staked his claim to the play as imagined by Hitchcock. Phantom Thread seems largely based in several ways. Are the scenes that define the couple’s balance of power. (“How long do these episodes last?” the curious doctor inquires.) Even apart from this maternal role, Alma is fiercely protective of Reynolds, who is driven by his love for Hutton’s fifth husband, Porfirio Rubirosa, a Dominican playboy who, in part, is the spell cast by his dead wife Rebecca and their malevolent housekeeper Mrs. Danvers, who is Rebecca’s representative. It is as if Anderson has directed these characters to give them to her. There’s a wonderful shot in which Reynolds sits cross-legged on the floor of his studio, needle in hand, looking up at Alma in a dress he has fashioned, lost in admiration for her creation—or rather creations. At least for its first half, this story of an artist who falls in love with his model is reminiscent of Shaw’s Pygmalion. Thereafter, Phantom Thread might be a postcard to the play as imagined by Hitchcock.

as the movie makes clear, sold visas to French Jews during World War II. When, at the wedding banquet, Barbara drunkenly plants her face in her plate, Alma feels the sacrilege even before Reynolds does. Anderson has at last given her a class enemy. The expediency upon which Alma and Reynolds embark to retrieve his emerald-colored satin gown from its undervaluing, unconscious owner is not only the movie’s comic set piece but also the most joyful expression of their relationship. Anderson makes movies that may refuse to explain themselves but nevertheless manage to engage the viewer, in part because he tends to cut from contiguous spaces to open ones as if inviting us to enter them. With its narrative repetitions and cryptic passages, as well as a honeymoon scene in the dazzling whiteness of the Alps and the lengthy Magic Kingdom New Year’s sequence that follows, Phantom Thread has a ballpoint-ink quality. Imagining himself always being watched by the absent mother to whom he is so attached, and who makes a ghostly appearance during one of his “episodes,” Reynolds also believes in an unspecified family curse that he credits Alma with breaking. In the end, Alma, who has figured out how to cast a spell of her own, has other ideas regarding the afterlife. Depending on one’s sense of her relationship with Reynolds, these can be read in several ways. Are the scenes that conclude her conversation with the doctor meant to be taken as optimistic fantasy or complete delusion? Does the movie have a Hollywood happy ending or rather the parody of one?

Phantom Thread is Anderson’s Hitchcock film—Notorious and Suspic, two other tales of perilous marriage, have also been mentioned by critics—it is an example of what Bloom calls “the return of the dead,” a maneuver by which “the new poem’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the new poem’s characteristic work.” The “characteristic work” in this case is Rebecca, in which the timorous, innocent Joan Fontaine is required to rescue Laurence Olivier from the spell cast by his dead wife Rebecca and their malevolent housekeeper Mrs. Danvers, who is Rebecca’s representa- tive. It is as if Anderson had directed these characters to give them to her. There’s a wonderful shot in which Reynolds sits cross-legged on the floor of his studio, needle in hand, looking up at Alma in a dress he has fashioned, lost in admiration for her creation—or rather creations. At least for its first half, this story of an artist who falls in love with his model is reminiscent of Shaw’s Pygmalion. Thereafter, Phantom Thread might be a postcard to the play as imagined by Hitchcock.
The Big Bang
Freeman Dyson

The following letters to relatives and the accompanying headnotes are adapted from Freeman Dyson’s Baker of Patterns: An Autobiography Through Letters, to be published by Liveright on March 27.

May 19, 1942
Cambridge, England

In my second year as an undergraduate at Cambridge, I registered for national service. I was in the Home Guard, which was supposed to help the army defeat the Germans in case of an invasion. In 1940 the threat of an invasion had been real, but in 1942 the Germans were heavily engaged in Russia, and nobody took the threat of an invasion seriously. It was lucky that we never had to do any real fighting. The Home Guard required me to take part in occasional night exercises. The invasion became more and more unlikely as the years went by, but the exercises continued until the end of the war. They helped to sustain the wartime spirit that made England a friendlier country during the war years.

I went on the exercise on Saturday after all. We sat in the parade ground till ten p.m., when my section set out for Grantchester on bicycles. The idea was to stop the Welsh Fusiliers from capturing Cambridge, so we were stationed near a bridge at Grantchester; two men to demolish the bridge and the rest to give protection to them. We took up a very halfhearted defensive position on the roadside, lying along the hedge, and waited for orders to demolish the bridge, or the arrival of the enemy. We had a beautiful notice saying Bridge Demolished and a small piece of explosive to make a bang. Of course, as always when I am on an exercise, the enemy never came anywhere near Grantchester, though they overran about a third of Cambridge. We stayed under that hedge from eleven p.m. till eleven a.m. It was impossible to take enough clothes to be able to keep warm, though the weather was quite fine. Last night I spent at the hut fire-watching. I was out from twelve till two a.m. but it was very quiet. We put the rest of the time. Fortunately the weather was again good. But this military activity does take up a great deal of energy when they have night operations.

January 24, 1943
Cambridge, England

The Germans bombed London heavily in 1940–1941 and less heavily with V-1 cruise missiles and V-2 rockets in 1944–1945. During the years 1942–1943 there was very little bombing. Occasionally a few bombers would come over and drop a few bombs, probably in response to German home population, who were suffering from the growing British and American bombing of Germany. One of the token raids on London happened in January 1943.

I wish I had been in London for the air raid; there is nothing that makes me so happy as a display of fireworks. It seems they have given up the idea of a Baedeker raid on Cambridge, which is a pity. I bought yesterday a set of War and Peace in Russian, the first I have seen in England, published in Moscow in 1941. Rather a wartime production I am afraid, but still readable and with quite large print. I shall settle down to it one day, not in the near future. It is 1,927 pages long. It costs eighteen roubles in Russia, and a pound in England, the difference being several hundred percent; I do not know where the money goes. It says they published 100,000 copies of the edition in 1941–42, evidently as in Britain. I read the concluding paragraphs, which point the moral of the whole work, that human affairs can only be understood by a belief in complete dependence on Providence. They have not, I am glad to say, been interfered with.

August 13, 1947
British Army on the Rhine, Münster

...More valuable than any of the amusements laid on for us are the conversations which occur from time to time. I will describe two of these which made a deep impression on me. First, a gathering of five men including myself: one from the Nineteenth Light Infantry (the most famous division) of the Afrika Corps, one from the motor-torpedo-boat section of the German navy in the North Sea, one from the U-boat service, one from RAF Transport Command, and one from RAF Bomber Command. We began talking about the war years, and the different views which we had of the events of that time; gradually we drifted towards personal reminiscences. I said very little, but the Germans soon became warmed to their subject and unburdened their hearts without restraint. I have seldom found the Germans so genuinely and obviously happy; a description by the U-boat sailor of what happens when a petrol tank is torpedosed was given with the most single-minded enthusiasm. It reminded me vividly of the descriptions we used to read at Bomber Command of successful incendiary attacks, and of the elation we felt when such attacks succeeded. It is ironic that when finally enemies meet and come together as friends, they could be able to determine each other with such stories....

December 7, 1947
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Yesterday I had a talk with [Hans] Bethe about my future. Bethe told me that unless I raise objections, he will press for me to be given a second year; he said this was “in the interests of science as well as in your own interests.”
our fiercest public battle so far, when I criticised some unwarrantably pessimistic remarks he had made about the Schwiniger theory. He came down on me like a ton of bricks and conclusively won the argument so far as the public was concerned. However, afterwards he was very friendly and even apologised to me. When I said I thought that the main thing is to keep a sense of proportion and avoid becoming a nervous wreck like Oppy. So far I think I am succeeding, but you should not be surprised when I write melancholic letters occasionally.

Witt (1922–2017), a French physicist.

November 25, 1948
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton, New Jersey

Last night the Oppenheimers gave their Thanksgiving party, a stand-up supper for about one hundred guests, mostly the institute and its wives. The party was quite enjoyable as such things go. The young physicists kept pretty much to themselves, and I did not speak to many people outside our circle. There were, however, two exceptions to this rule. First, it was a farewell party for T. S. Eliot, who is returning to Europe to travel, and I did not speak to any of them.

Thanksgiving party, a stand-up supper. (He is an expert cook.) Then Cécile returned him around, resplendent in black tie and dinner jacket, making sure he met and spoke to her husband. The husband, who is an expert cook and was standing around by himself miserably while all this went on. He did not seem to talk to anybody all the evening. It makes me feel sick just to think of the horror of the lives these two people may be living. Evidently the reason the wife seized upon me for a partner is that I am the only one of the young women at the party whom she had met before. The name of the husband (I wonder if you guessed it) is Kurt Gdél.

The horror of this scene was real, but Adele Gdél was rarely drunk, and she was a good wife for Kurt when she was sober.

The queerest and maddest part of all this, I found it hard to keep the tears from running out of my eyes. After all, I have my reasons. The main room lamenting the fact that T. S. Eliot, who is returning to Europe to travel, and I did not speak to any of them.

For the academic year 1958–1959 I took a leave of absence from the Institute for Advanced Study to work at the General Atomic Laboratory in La Jolla on Project Orion, a nuclear bomb–propelled spaceship that we thought could fly to Mars and the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn. It did not turn out to be feasible.

I was getting so wild and jumping about so that it made me very uncomfortable, and I finally succeeded in returning her to her husband. The husband, who is a solemn and frightened-looking little man, was standing around by himself miserably while all this went on. He did not seem to talk to anybody all the evening. It makes me feel sick just to think of the horror of the lives these two people may be living. Evidently the reason the wife seized upon me for a partner is that I am the only one of the young women at the party whom she had met before. The name of the husband (I wonder if you guessed it) is Kurt Gdél.

I spent the summer of 1956 in La Jolla working for General Atomic, a start-up company founded in 1955 by Freddy de Hoffmann, a young scientist from Los Alamos, to build and sell fission reactors in the commercial market.

The work may turn out to be very exciting, or it may be a terrible flop. It is hard to say at present. In many ways it reminds me of Bomer Command. A group of us has been given the job of thinking up a nuclear reactor which shall be absolutely safe, so it can be played around with by untrained people and there can be no question of it blowing up. Such a reactor would be greatly in demand for hospitals and such places where they need a reactor but do not want to maintain a staff of physicists to take care of it. This is a clear enough assignment, and if we can do something along these lines, it will be exciting. On the other hand we have the feeling, as we did at Bomer Command, that we are remote from real life. Few of us know anything about the practical construction of reactors, and we do not have any experimental facilities here. So all we can do is to think up general ideas and follow them to a preliminary design stage. Perhaps something good will come out of it.

I was glad that Bohr was enthusiastic about our spaceship. He thinks of it as something with which one may once again try to make a reasonable bargain with Russia. Of course, the criticisms about our spaceship. He thinks of it as something with which one may once again try to make a reasonable bargain with Russia. Of course, the difficulties now are in some ways greater than they were in 1944. But at least the secrecy problem is not so obsessive as it was then. The politicians have learned that secrets do not stay secret forever, and one can talk much more freely than in 1944. The problem is that we do not have much to offer Russia in return for opening up their country to us. I do not have much hope that we can solve the problems of war and peace this way. But I am glad if we try. Bohr encouraged me a lot.

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, organized by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, at which Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech.
Caesar Bloody Caesar
Josephine Quinn

The Landmark Julius Caesar: The Complete Works: Gallic War, Civil War, Alexandrian War, African War, Spanish War edited and translated from the Latin by Kurt A. Raaflaub, Pantheon, 793 pp., $50.00

When Julius Caesar was thirty-one years old in 69 BCE, so the story goes, and serving as a junior Roman magistrate in Spain, he once stood lamenting before a statue of Alexander the Great, because he had achieved so little at an age by which Alexander had already conquered the world.

He had reason for concern. Although his recent election as a quaestor—one of the officials responsible for finances—had given him a lifetime seat in the Senate, Roman politics were more of a funnel than a ladder: twenty quaestors who had been elected at thirty years old could compete nine years later for eight praetorships, and then, three years after that, for two annual consulships. To rise, you needed political friends, name recognition, and, in order to buy elections, a great deal of money.

Caesar was already admired as an orator, but he was best known for his debts, and he was good at making enemies, especially among the powerful conservatives in the Senate. Furthermore, while he had ably fulfilled the standard military duties of a young Roman nobleman, he had attracted attention only for his first assignment overseas at the age of about twenty: a trip to Bithynia in northern Anatolia, where he had become friendly—many said extremely friendly—with its king, Nicomedes. Whether or not the rumors were true, this was the first hint of a lifelong tendency to test the bounds of Rome's unwritten moral and legal codes.

What he realized over the next decade was that two very good friends could make up for a lot of enemies if one was Marcus Crassus, the richest man in Rome, and the other his finest general, Pompey the Great: without a doubt to Caesar’s annoyance, “the Great.” This clique—which has gone no doubt to Caesar’s annoyance, “the general, Gnaeus Pompey—nicknamed, Caligula was that two very good friends and for his first assignment overseas at the ancient by which Alexander had already conquered the world.

He and his friends ensured that wouldn’t happen for some time by securing him an unprecedented five-year military command over three Roman provinces to the north of Italy, including Transalpine Gaul (modern Provence), and later having it extended to the ten years. It is easy to see that this would count for a second consulship, which would give him the chance to put his earlier legislation and subsequent actions on a firmer legal basis. He further engaged his opponents by turning this assignment into the greatest land grab ever accomplished by a Roman general, bringing all the rest of Gaul under his personal power: still not at the level of Alexander’s achievements, but aworthy rival to Pompey’s.

Caesar himself recorded the first seven years of the Gallic War in seven books of Commentaries; these are included in a new and highly readable translation of Caesar’s work in the Landmark series, along with his memoir of the first two years of the subsequent Civil War and four additional books written by his officers to fill out the account of his campaigns. These are the first Latin texts to receive the sumptuous Landmark treatment already enjoyed by Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Arrian, and it suits them very well, with copious maps, diagrams, illustrations, footnotes, and appendices to help the reader keep track of the people, places, and siege machines involved, as well as another forty-three background essays available online, written by a lively mixture of old hands and Young Turks.

“Gaul, if you take all of it into account, is divided into three regions” is Caesar’s opening line in the Gallic War, and in the first three books he brings these in turn under Roman control: first central France north of the existing Roman province, then the “Belgians” in the north, then the peoples of the Atlantic coast. He makes brief sorties after that across the Rhine and the Channel, while resistance to occupation builds up in Gaul itself. This comes together in early 52 in the general rebellion Caesar describes in Book 7, which culminates in his defeat of the Gallic leader Vercingetorix at Alesia in modern Burgundy. At this point Cae- sar brings his account of these wars to a close on a suitable note of triumph; in reality, he remained in Gaul for another two years, briefing down further rebellions, campaigns that were later written up by his legate Hirtius in an eighth book.

Cicero praised Caesar’s Commentaries—the first example we have of Latin historical prose—as “naked, straightforward, and graceful, stripped of rhetorical ornament as of clothing.” Too

long and too good a read to be Caesar’s official reports to the Senate, these must have been written for wider public consumption, presumably with an eye to the consular elections of 49: Caesar constantly emphasizes that he is acting on behalf of the Roman state, and that the Roman people are making huge territorial gains in Gaul. He writes with considerable style and attention to narrative, with exciting battles and detailed descriptions of encampments, bridge construction, and ship-building, and with an emphasis on the speed and scale of operations: the word “quickly” occurs sixty-two times, and “big” more than two hundred.

We naturally hear little of Caesar the man as opposed to the calm, decisive, and brilliant general. We must turn to his later biographers for accounts of the trimming, shaving, and plucking, the comb-over he adopted to hide his baldness; the trimming, shaving, and plucking, the mortal rate is staggering, as ten legions of highly trained and battle-hardened Roman soldiers methodically work their way through the states of Gaul, targeting entire peoples for destruction. At the battle of Allobroges against Nervii, Caesar reports that both the people and their name were reduced almost to annihilation: survivors tell him that of 60,000 men of fighting age, only five hundred remain. Nor was this absent-minded genocide: when Caesar prepares a campaign against the Eburones in northeastern Gaul, he boasts of his intention “to destroy their stirps ac nomen [stock and name].”

Death was not the only way to destroy a people. When the Atuatuci launched a surprise attack on Cae- sar’s bivouac, the consul being a vixen, he cut to his later biographers for accounts of the trimming, shaving, and plucking, the fringed and belted senatorial tunic, the comb-over he adopted to hide his baldness—(and his relief when the Senate voted to give him the honor of wearing a laurel wreath at all times), the mosaic flooring he carried on campaigns to furnish his tent, his “falling sickness” (probably epilepsy), or his notorious aversion to alcohol. And we hear nothing of the vast personal profits that Caesar made in Gaul—enough to pay off his accumulated electoral debts, reward his officers and men, and fund a series of vanity building projects in the heart of Rome that kept the absent general at the center of attention during the 50s. His contemporaries were certainly aware of what was happening; the poet Catullus, writing in Rome, says that one of Caesar’s corrupt officers “has all the riches that used to belong to remotest Britons and Triburians.”

The Gallic War does paint a revealing picture of Roman imperialism. Conquest beyond provincial bounds was not a success, not for Caesar. It was born before a statue of Alexander the Great, because he had achieved so little at an age by which Alexander had already conquered the world.

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to run down and slaughter the women and children as they fled. Those who were not caught drowned in the Rhine. Other sources tell us that 400,000 people died. Was that the culture then? Not everyone, it seems, or not exactly: although the Senate voted sacrifices of thanksgiving on news of the victory, Caesar, Younger and other senators proposed that Caesar be extraded to the Germans, not for the massacre itself, but for breaking a truce.

When an election loomed on the horizon, Caesar had good reason to be alert to his readers' sensibilities, and he makes no attempt to disguise or play down the bloodshed. What was attractive to Romans of all classes in their own name? One conclusion a reader could draw from The Landmark Julius Caesar is that that they saw the "Hairy Gauls" as distant from or less human than themselves, perhaps even as an appropriate target. When Caesar notes, for example, that if Orgetorix had been convicted of attempting to usurp the monarchy, "the Helvetii, "this punishment would inevitably have been to be burned alive," a footnote suggests that this "helps to characterize the Helvetii as Hairy Gauls." This is, however, questionable: the same punishment was prescribed in Rome for crimes against the state, and less than fifty years before, Gauls and Greeks and had been buried alive in the Roman cattle market just for good luck.

More generally, Caesar does not dehumanize the Gauls; in fact he presents their individual causes and their desire for liberty as rational, even sympathetic. In 52 the chief magistrate of the Aedui, Convitoldius, asks his countrymen why the Aedui come to Caesar and make him the arbiter concerning their own laws within their own justice system, any more than the Romans came to the Aedui?" Caesar calls these Aedui "brothers and kinsmen" to Rome, and he describes these and other Gauls in terms that would have made sense to a Roman senator, not a Gaul.

In his own account of these events Caesar entirely ignores what later seemed the pivotal moment: the crossing of the Rubicon, a river so minor that it is not even mentioned in his telling he simply leads his men from Ravenna to Rimini. Perhaps he was right to play down the significance of events to come. He continues to sue for a diplomatic solution. The threat of a military coup had in any case become a relatively familiar tactic in the previous generation, and those that had been temporary. It was only in retrospect, knowing what Caesar and Rome became, that this decision appeared a point of no return.

Caesar's three books of Civil War cover the first two years of campaigning. He defeats Pompey's generals in Italy and Spain, returns to Rome to supervise his own election as consul, and then follows Pompey east across the Adriatic, eventually chasing him down to Pharsalus in Thessaly. There he defeats his old friend's far greater numbers with a brilliant display, though he says himself, of generalship and improvisation.

Caesar's version is again a major theme. Caesar presents the civil war as a dissenso, or personal disagreement, and he emphasizes his clemency to-ward defeated Roman citizens, as well as his constant (and strictly extrazon-stitutional) attempts to negotiate directly with Pompey. At the same time, he insists that his actions had the sup-port of the Roman people, more hand amputations, and a bizarre account of a temporary camp built in Spain out of the bodies and weapons of defeated Pompeians, topped by the heads of the enemy stuck on sword points.

Caesar defeated his last opponents in Spain. In 45. By then he was consul for the fourth time and had the previ-ous year been awarded a ten-year dic-tatorship to rule the state—a perfectly permanent: in February 44 he was made dictator for life, and he had recently become the first living person to have his head depicted on a coin minted in Rome. He had also welcomed divine honors, something that had long been an acceptable practice for Roman generals abroad but was traditionally avoided among supposedly equal citi-zens. It is generally believed, killed, offering another round of civil war. The room in which he was murdered was closed up, and he was buried in a family crypt.

His writing too slipped into obscu-rity for centuries, not least because for over a millennium it was ascribed to other authors. Since the Renaissance, however, Caesar's simple, direct Latin has worked almost everywhere. Not everyone's, it seems, or not exactly: in the mid-twentieth century, a career as positions in colonial territories became scarce, and the embrace of Caesar by fascist politicians— Mussolin calls his second book De Bello Gallico, which had become hard to ignore, it is now back in US classrooms as a central text in the Advanced Placement curriculum. This brutal tale of conquest, enslavement, and genocide nation to nation, had even brilliant choice for classroom discus-sion, but the reality of the Latin lex-sion may best be captured by the young boy and girl from Holloway in Down with Skool!, Geoffery Wil-lans's immortal rendering of English schoolboy life in the 1950s:

They say: "The gauls—galli—subject—go on molesworth op-pugnant—what does oppugnant mean—they are attacking loss-ers. D. The final did say no moles-worth? Why on earth attack a ditch? Keep your mind on the sen-tence. The galls are attacking the ditch. What? I am quite unable to inform you molesworth for what purpose the Gauls wished to attack the ditch. The latin is correct. That suf-fices.

Another author, perhaps Hirtius again, continued this tale. In Egypt Caesar battled with surprising diffi-culty, and received, among other things, a boy, and a girl of perhaps fifteen. He eventually delivered the throne to the twenty-one-year-old Cleopatra and her twelve-year-old brother, whom she restored to Egyptian sovereign-ship and, it is generally believed, killed with poison. The author spoars his readers such details, as well as the notorious assassination of the pope, with support by having herself delivered to them through enemy lines in a sack, or what other writers assure us was a considerable delay in his campaigning...
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The Square and the Tower: Networks and Power, from the Medici to Facebook
by Niall Ferguson.

Penguin, 563 pp., $30.00

The Square and the Tower claims to present “a new historical narrative, in which major changes—dating back to the Age of Discovery and the Reforma-
tion, if not earlier—can be understood, in the language of metaphor, as the challenges to established hierarchies by networks.” Social networks “have always been much more important in history than most historians have thought, but they have been on hierarchical organizations such as states, have allowed,” and never more so than in modern times. The first “networked era” followed the introduc-
tion of the printing press in Europe in the late fifteenth century. The second such era—our own—dates from the 1970s, and the pace of change has ac-
terated along with new communication technolo-
gies.

The intervening period, from the late 1790s until the late 1960s, saw the opposite trend: hierarchical institutions re-established their control and successfully shut down or co-opted networks. The zenith of hierarchically organized power was in fact the mid-twentieth cen-
tury—the era of totalitarian regi-
mes and total wars.

Today we live in “the network age.” Niall Ferguson believes that until re-
cently networks have been neglected by historians, who prefer to study institu-
tions that leave well-preserved and ac-
cessible archives. He confesses that he has only recently come to appreciate that his own books “were also books about networks.” For many years the British-born financial historian, chron-
icler of the Rothschild banks, television broadcaster, and prolific journalist had been “casual” in the way he thought about networks. When writing about the career of Siegmund Warburg, he had in his mind’s eye “a vague diagram that connected Warburg to other mem-
bers of the Warburg family, and to elite through various ties of kinship, business and ‘elective affinity.’” Yet it did not occur to Ferguson to “think in a rigorous way about that network.”

He had yet to adopt “formal network analysis.” This book, he writes, “is an attempt to atone for those sins of omission.”

If the study of networks enables a new kind of historical narrative to be written, one might suppose that human history is the chief area in which they operate. But when Ferguson attempts to spell out how they work, he begins with biology: “The animal circulatory, nervous, and endocrine systems, whose function and structure are the outcome of natural selection, are not the only biological systems that have evolved as a coop-
terative and adaptive system. The human brain is another example.” Networks, he says, are not only pervasive in the natural world but also quint-
essential human.

These are large claims, but they are not new. Attempts to explain histori-
ical change in terms derived from biol-
yogy recur throughout modern thought. The Victorian prophet of laissez-faire capitalism Herbert Spencer argued Networks, it seems, are not only perva-
sive in the natural world but also quint-
essential human.

The Square and the Tower promises, in Ferguson’s words, “few episodes of networks” of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, a “network de-
sign” of the Arpanet (the proto-version of the Internet), Donald Trump’s 2016 online network, and the Chinese Com-

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est comrades at the top. Were these “horizontal” or “vertical” organiza-
tions? Or did they shift at some point from one to the other? A figure of speech cannot tell us.

It may be from an awareness of the limitations of metaphor that Ferguson invokes “network science” repeatedly in The Square and the Tower. The text is embelished with dozens of “network diagrams” and a foun-
dational concepts of network theory, the Medici network, the sexual network of the Bloomsbury Group circa 1925, the “knowledge networks” of Richard Nixon and Donald Trump. Networks are profoundly inegalitar-
ian, Ferguson concludes, “the history of mankind looks quite different.”
of puzzlement: "So repressive were both the totalitarian regimes—Hitler's and Stalin's—that it remains difficult to fathom why anyone living in a free society would have been attracted to either of them.

In chapter 33, Ferguson discusses how members of the Cambridge Apostles, the notorious "Cambridge Spy Society" founded in 1820, "had become estranged from Victorian values both sexually and politically around 1900." At Oxford, the network seemed around the idealist ideologies of the former high commissioner of South Africa Alfred Milner, which envisioned "a muscular, martial, imperial and heterosexual ideal of masculinity that was quite different." After 1900, Ferguson tells us, "the network that evolved there in and around the Cambridge Apostles' war effort." Many British spies were gay—and homosexual." Prominent Apostles included Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster.

In 1939, Ferguson notes, Forster was writing that if he had to choose between betraying his country and betraying his friend, "I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.... Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of a State. When they do—down with the State, say I." By the outbreak of World War I, "a significant proportion of Apostles agreed with E. M. Forster's position that friendship came before loyalty to King and Country. The Board of Trade told them 'took this estrangement a step further: from conscientious objection to treason.' Among the Cambridge spies, Antony Blunt joined the Apostles in 1928 and sponsored Guy Burgess as a member for four years later. "Both were academically brilliant. And both were gay.... However, the historically significant fact is this: that they were Communists who willingly offered their services to Stalin. Ferguson reiterates his sense of puzzlement: "Why did they do it?" He reiterates a question for which the story he tells has the authority of science. He takes the reader on a high-speed tour from the Third Dynasty of Ur in southern Mesopotamia circa 2200–2000 BC to the French Revolution and the refutation of European order after Napoleon, the significance of steam power and electrical cables in the British Empire, and the writing of Mao Zedong in late-twentieth-century China, the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in 1916, National Socialism as "a movement" that "can be said to have gone viral between 1930 and 1953," the "brief encounter" of the British philosopher and historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin with the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova in Lenigrad in 1945, "the transition to a more networked world" in the 1970s and "the triumph of Davos man" that supposedly ensued, and George Soros's part in "breaking the Bank of England" in September 1992, together with vignettes of the use of networks in the September 11 attacks, the ascendency of Facebook as a distance-conquering social network, the rise of ISIS, Brexit (which Ferguson describes as "a victory for a network— and network science—over the hierarchies of the British establishment"), and Trump's electoral victory in 2016.

Not all of these vignettes serve any discernible purpose. What does an anecdote about Isaiah Berlin and Anna Akhmatova have to do with the book's central narrative?... Ferguson may be right to distract from the fact that Ferguson's conflict between networks and hierarchies reiterates an old and familiar story. As set out by nineteenth-century writers such as T. B. Macaulay and W. H. E. Lecky, the Whig interpretation of history told the story of human nature and its struggle to form a common culture; the problem of the new networks—Western Europe's fashioning of the modern state, the networked world—"returns the origins of market society are available, after all. The political economist Karl Polanyi offered an alternative view in The Great Transformation (1944), in which he described free markets as artifacts of state power, constructed to fuse the vulnerabilities of early Victorian England as a means of breaking up social networks that had been inherited from premodern times in order to promote laissez-faire capitalism. Inverting Ferguson's account, Polanyi's is in some ways more convincing. Ferguson does not mention it. The Square and the Tower may be the best recent representation of the dual interpretation of history to an audience of hedge fund investors. Consisting of a series of historical snapshots thinly disguised as a PowerPoint presentation, interspersed with diagrams—is that of a PowerPoint presentation. This is not a study of history but another of the business books of the day. This is one case of the book—sixty thumbnail chapters, interspersed with diagrams—is that of the best documentary, New York City, 2009.
Kill All the Editors

Laura Kipnis

Men and Apparitions by Lynne Tillman.
Soft Skull, 397 pp., $16.95 (paper)

The Complete Madame Realism and Other Stories by Lynne Tillman.
Semiotext(e), 295 pp., $17.95 (paper)

Lynne Tillman is widely revered by other writers—the galaxy of her new novel, Men and Apparitions, boasted a program of appearances at scores of luminar-
ies branded “TILLMAN SUPERFANS” who shoved on the praise with a back-
hoe—though not by me. I suspect that raving writers do things for me, but don’t worry, this isn’t the setup for a hit job.

Reading Tillman reminds me of once visiting the home of an acquaint-
ance. Her partner was a brilliant phil-
osopher who’d been left crippled and hunchbacked by a childhood disease.
I found myself wondering whether my acquaintance managed to overlook the hunchback or was attracted to it. Either way, she seemed my moral better: far more humane, or far more perverse.
The partner was a bastard, nasty to everyone, especially to my acquaintance.
Was this too part of the attraction, or something she could overlook? I didn’t understand the erotics of the situation, but witnessing it felt like an
indictment of my own conventional-
ality. At one point I idly pulled a maga-
zine down from a pile on a dusty end table, in the hope that the choice of equa-
lord—and dislodged a stack of months-
old unopened mail underneath. “How
can people live like this?” I screamed silently inside my head, shamed by my bourgeois housekeeping standards but also really wanting to get home.

Spending time chez Tillman feels
like that to me: disjunctive, fascinat-
ing, a little upbringing. It calls things
into question. The random digressions
make me crazy, yet I want to imitate them.

When critics encounter an alien sens-
bility, bloodbaths often ensue. It can
be fun to write a takedown, especially
when it could be labeled “criticism,” albeit written
aloud—this omnivorous narration that
nods very closely to the perceptions of a character—Madame Realism—who
sometimes seems not entirely unlike
Tillman, though I wouldn’t be able
to say where one leaves off and the
other takes up. (The Madame Realism
behaviors do for the society that enacts
or supports them”—and the history
of ethnography, and the arrival of cultural
studies in the 1990s, the nomstop didac-
ticism makes him almost believable as
a male academic, but I wouldn’t call
him engaging.

Not that I could have appended to the phrase “ranges free” a
joky filip such as “like a pricy chicken.”
And then followed with “kidding.” This is one of Tillman’s predilections, viewing Men and Apparitions: a dumb not-exactly-joke,
followed by a parenthetical not-exactly-
retraction. I don’t have the technology
for this, but other takes up. (The Madame Realism

I studied painting as an undergrad, but
I’ve venerated Erving Goffman ever since. The
self; we venerate Erving Goffman
who’s been left crippled and hunch-
baked by a childhood disease. When critics encounter an alien sen-
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piece, which make up about half
the book, were originally written for Art
in America and other art venues in the
late 1980s and 1990s."

Then? Not as a geographic locale, but
resonant “for her.” Maybe “downtown”
or “stream” or “conventional” “are not
experimental” or “traditional” or “main-
courses and their circle; a mini- treatise on
for much exposition about the Adam-

One of the more pleasant things about
reading tillman reminds me of

This volume, but there are lots. “Haha”
also recurs, occasionally amputated to
“ha.” Also “half-kidding.” But I’m
not Tillman, and after it crossed my
mind to append “like a pricy chicken” to
“ranges free” (because the phrase
“free-range chicken” strikes me as un-
accountably funny) I said to myself:
that’s enough. I typed and deleted it, but in any event, I self-
censored, having ingrained the habit
of not overcommitting.

I am a tenured associate professor of media studies at a university in New York City. My work is primarily in the field of “downtown” or “conventional” “are not
experimental” or “traditional” or “main-

These are not insights that are going
to set the world on fire. In fact, many
of Zeke’s earliest decrees are banali-
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reports on old television shows: Ellen coming out on _Ellen_, the documentary _An American Family_. We get a chapter of Zeke's field notes. We get what seem like diary entries of someone's journal entries (Tillman's? Zeke's?).

Zeke favors clichés and outmoded slang—“too cool for school,” “had our groove on”—reveling in melodramatic language like a postmodern novelist. The writing is baggy. Zeke is flat. Occasionally there's some discussion about surfaces and depth, but perhaps that explication where Tillman stands on these matters, but the explication is itself so flat that it doesn’t quite register. (A less tetchy reader than I—courtesy of respect to the author—might say that all this pastiche and depthlessness is the aesthetic logic of late capitalism, which shattered our identities well before the novelists got there.)

Then, suddenly, Zeke's wife Maggie cheats on him with his handsome friend CW and—as if to prove Tony Tanner's assertion in _Adultery in the Novel_ that marital transgression is the lifeblood of Western literature, because breaking contracts is what the novel as a form is all about— _Men and Apparitions_ springs to life. For twenty pages, Zeke—wounded, ranting, crazed—acquires an inner life and human depth. He feels instead of tells. In instant, he's interesting. The writing picks up pace, sprints around, does some jumping jacks, as if to say, “See, I could do this sort of thing if I wanted to.”

Then we abruptly downshift, coasting to a stop with a mini-essay on “The Ineinnarrable,” regarding the vagaries of description (I think?) and namechecking Wittgenstein, Clifford Geertz, Gilbert Ryle, the chemist-philosopher Karl von Reichenbach, Edward Eggleston, and the eighteenth-century animal magnetist Franz Mesmer, in the hope of three not particularly comprehensible (to me) pages— “Words insinuate. Pictures doubt,” the section concludes. Okay, but so what?

The difficulty with this stream of aleatory observations and unconnected assertions is that unpinned to stakes of any sort—a narrative, an argument—they lack the texture of a rhythm. They all occur at the same latitude, making them indistinguishable and forgettable. In her essay “Doing Laps Without a Pool” (2009)—which Sharon Mesmer, who interviewed Tillman for _The Paris Review_, quoted in an attempt to pin her down about her tactics—she writes: “I don’t want to take a position. Not taking a position is a position. It acknowledges the inability to know with absolute surety. … Anything can be on the page.” In another essay, on Andy Warhol, Tillman remarks, “How do we know? How do we know for ourselves what’s important. How do we choose?” Her interviewer points out that these are framed as statements, not questions that ack

As demonstrated in the adulatory section of _Men and Apparitions_, Tillman is perfectly capable of writing an adept psychological novel. She can toss off polished sentences with the best of them, and many in the Madame Realism collection are. She can produce an incisive piece of literary criticism on a conventional subject like Edith Whar- ton, as in _What Would Lynne Tillman Do?_. Amid the non–Madame Realism essays in the new volume, the reader is perplexed upon a singularly sharp piece of straightforward art criticism about the work of Cindy Sherman. Madame Realism is an interesting critical innovation, and far livelier company than Zeke—better at making her observations matter—though they could also be cousins: both have cluttered minds and are prone to punning wordplay, deliverance into party-line expounded histories of whatever artist or thinker comes to mind. Madame R. takes a wide-eyed view of the world, Warhol's interest in portraiture, but confronted with the unedited blitzkriegs of prose in these books, it's his early films that came to mind. Warhol too abused editing—_Blow Job_ (1964) and _Empire_ (1964) he famously set up a camera and just kept shooting, later splicing the unedited rolls together into a continuous shot. There was no way to make no choices, except that that's a pretty aggressive choice. Both films were also supposed to be projected at a slowed-down speed, making them over eight hours long. At its premiere, according to Jonas Mekas, who shot it, after ten minutes thirty or forty people surrounded him and threatened to break chairs on his head and mem-

In _Men and Apparitions_, a book that feels so definitively punctuated and keeps it up for close to four hundred pages, it can't be exactly coincidental that Zeke's mother, Ellen Cooper Stark, is herself an editor of manuscripts—“histories, political science, biographies and memoirs, of intellectuals.” Before Zeke was born she worked at a press in Boston. Now she freelances. “Mother, what’s editing,” Zeke asks her. “Making writing better, checking information, correcting grammar, and being fair to the text,” she answers. “Fair,” Zeke counters, like a gangster living on borrowed time, constantly looking over your shoulder, and our freedom, goddamnit, and fi-

Punctuated by welcome jabs at its expense. She can be a bit of a ditz, prone to audible sighs and lame asides— “Perhaps imitation is the sincerest form of flattery”—but also quite the savant. She likes pondering the fiction of identity, especially her own, and divulging mundane facts about her “self”—she doesn’t get carseck if she rides in the back seat, for instance. Good to know.

She pays visits to museums and landmarks, then mulls, and reports on overheard conversations. She's great on a trip to Ellis Island, delivering a whirlwind of speculation about immigration, memorials, the myth of the melting pot. On the way home her African cabdriver tells her she’d never experienced racism, to be sure. She’s busted out. “Did the explication is itself so flat that it doesn’t quite register. (A less tetchy reader than I—courtesy of respect to the author—might say that all this pastiche and depthlessness is the aesthetic logic of late capitalism, which shattered our identities well before the novelists got there.)

She’s on the run. But has she broken through the invisible barrier? Who could get any writing done? It helps instinctively, too “uptown.” It helps that marital transgression is baggy. Zeke is flat. Occasionally there's some discussion about surfaces and depth, but perhaps that explication where Tillman stands on these matters, but the explication is itself so flat that it doesn’t quite register. (A less tetchy reader than I—courtesy of respect to the author—might say that all this pastiche and depthlessness is the aesthetic logic of late capitalism, which shattered our identities well before the novelists got there.)

Perhaps what Tillman is choosing to do or yielding to—with all the rando-

ness and clutter feels harder to her than doing the more conventional thing: giving shape to the work, cutting down the excess, straightening the disarray. Maybe that would feel, instinctively, too “uptown.” It helps to know that Andy Warhol has long been a touchstone for Tillman: “part of the way I think,” she said. In fact, she interviewed many of the Factory denizens for her 1995 book _The Velvet Years: Warhol's Factory, 1965–67_. As a novelist, Tillman has said she shares
The Story of the Jews, Vol. 2: Belonging, 1492–1900
by Simon Schama
Ecco, 790 pp., $39.99

The story of the Jews extends farther back than that of any other faith: perhaps only Hindus and Zoroastrians come close. But having more history does not help in the writing of it. On the contrary: the difficulties have been evident since the appearance of the first standard history of the subject, Heinrich Graetz’s compendious Geschichte der Juden, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Can one mean to write the history of a religious group? Is one charting the vicissitudes of a creed? Or is the real story the fate of a people?

There is the risk of seeking—and hence finding—some essential core of Jewishness that may, in fact, never have existed. Alternatively, since Jews have existed as a minority in most times and places, living among others with other beliefs, the subject may dissolve before one’s eyes. Is there really a Jewish history independent of the histories of these larger societies? Take architecture, clothes, food: in their way of life don’t the Jews of Cochin, for example, have more in common with the sultans of Mysore than they do with the Vilna Gaon?

The pioneering Graetz, an early participant in the struggle between reform and conservative Judaism, was a scholar who believed in Wissenschaft—scientific study. But he was also not afraid to embellish the evidence when required, and some accused him of playing fast and loose with the facts. Indeed, one of the charges laid against him was that he gave his readers stories (Geschichten) rather than history (Geschichte).

This brings us straight to Simon Schama, who has been interested in the relationship between the storyteller and the historian for about as long as he has been interested in the Jewish past. One of his very first books treated the impact of the Rothschilds’ philanthropy in the Holy Land. His tale-telling, genre-defying Landscape and Memory (1995) opened with his Ashkenazi forebears in the forests of tsarist Russia. The Story of the Jews, his television series first broadcast in 2013, marked his most sustained engagement with the subject. Now comes the tie-in, a multivolume history likewise entitled The Story of the Jews. The first volume, Finding the Words (2013), took the story from biblical times to 1492; Belonging is the second. A third is promised.

The story? More like a bevy of them—the wilder the better. Schama begins among the swirling millenarian expectations and false messiahs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and concludes with a loving account of Theodor Herzl and his dream of building Zion in Ottoman Palestine. In between is a roller coaster of a ride that takes us from the Christians and the conversos of Iberia to Jewish power centers in ports like Antwerp and Izmir. Glamorous figures such as Beatriz de Luna and her nephew Joseph Nasi, the Duke of Naxos, head a colorful and varied cast. There are pen portraits galore—the first Jewish playwright, the passions of an early pope, and the pugilistic feats of the famous eighteenth-century boxer Daniel Mendoza. The geographic reach is vast—from the communities of China and India to the American colonies.

In a career spanning forty-plus years Schama has become more than a historian. A prolific and acclaimed broadcaster, straddling history and the visual arts, he is renowned for the brilliance of his style and the extraordinary range of his learning. If Graetz wrote to educate rabbis, Schama’s books, Op-Eds, and TV shows have been designed for a very different purpose: to bring the past to life with all the excitement and imaginative power at his disposal in order to reach as wide a public as he can.

Back in 1991, he wrote an essay for The New York Times entitled “Clio Has a Problem,” in which he warned that professional historians were hobbling themselves with political correctness and analytical aridity, losing sight of the bigger picture by setting expertise above plotlines and drama. They were—horror of horrors—making the past dull. What he wanted was “literary playfulness.” He demanded “great narratives” written in “thrilling, beautiful prose” and capable of stirring or seizing the imagination. By this point, two of his books already showed what he had in mind: The Emarrassment of Riches (1987), about the Golden Age Netherlands, and his study of the French Revolution, Citizens (1989). More followed, including Landscape and Memory and a three-volume history of Britain. Now it is the Jews’ turn.

Schama’s mentor at Cambridge was J. H. Plumb, an influential don and argumentative popularizer who detested the droll pretensions of “scientific history.” Plumb’s own supervisor had been interested in the relationship between the storyteller and the historian for about as much as in the words themselves; style and analysis held each other in balance. In Belonging, explanation has receded to the vanishing point. We are never told, for instance, why the post-Iberian story of the Jews in the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire is so important as to warrant opening with it. We learn that a new form of historical consciousness emerged among Jews in the early modern Mediterranean but not why, or where it went. Thory questions about the structure of command, questions that scholars have argued about for decades, are sidestepped. Much more attention is given to Jewish mysticism than to Jewish rationalism; more time is spent in the Low Countries and Italy than in Eastern Europe and Russia. None of these preferences is necessarily wrong in itself, but none is argued for or explained. Instead, the book depends on its stories and their telling.

To say that Schama’s prose compels attention is an understatement—on pages that might otherwise be drenched in overwhelming fact and scholarship, it is fizzy and crackle. The obvious diagnosis is that this betrays some chronic fear of being boring. But television too has left its mark. The screen does not just take on the personality; it has a personality of its own. Disliking numbers, statistics, or the abstract, it prizes the episodic and the anecdotal and the story over the narrative. What does it mean, for instance, when modern camera lingers lovingly over the materiality of place, landscape, food, and dress, and these get doled out in abundance on the page here. Schama likes listing stuff—a cataloging of the commodities Ashkenazi merchants traded in runs to sixty-five items—and quickly gets gustatory. In Antwerp, he tells us:

Pasties and tarts, loaves and puddings, all were transformed by a hit of sugar and spice. The whims, passion, the custard and the cake all wanted dusting—so much toothsome powder in a sprinkling of pulverised grains and pellets. East met West when cumin seeds or cloves stuFt a plain hard golden cheese and made it fragrant. A dish of beans would get a dusting of nutmeg (as it still does in Antwerp and Amsterdam, where any kind of green beans are known as s Berzzbenen); the tortorie of a throbbing tooth ebb after a drop or two of oil of cloves.

In Ottoman Istanbul:

There was a time when Jewish catering opened doors. Every Friday afternoon, following Muslim prayers but before the Jewish Sabbath, a caravan of confectionaries from the villa of the Great Jew in Pera was delivered to Topkapi Palace. Seated upon silk cushions, the sultan and his children, including Selim II, awaited with keen anticipation the delicacies brought to him on Chinese porcelain: pigeon dainties baked in rose water and sugar; goose livers chopped with Corinth raisins and the spices which were, after all, the Jew’s to command; also some items preserved in the kitchen of culinary nostalgia, from the ancient Turkie days of tents and flocks and racing ponies; the sour yogurts and yufka, the un-leavened bread that was wrapped around a pilaf.

It is a bit like reading some celebrity chef of the past andwe is slightly dis appointed not to find mouth-watering recipes accompanying the text in little boxes.

Yet behind the strident dazzle of the style lies the galvanizing, almost tactile quality of Schama’s imagery, there is something close to an argument, one that is all the more potent for being unstated. Sugar is sugar, isn’t it? Some
March 22, 2018

**Exhibition:** February 8 to March 11, 2018

**Opening Reception:** Friday, February 9, 2018 6–8 pm.

**Ann Schaumburger: New Work**

**A.I.R. Gallery**


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**Boris Lurie Art Foundation**

599 11th Avenue, Floor 4, New York, NY 10036

Boris Lurie in Habana, a large-scale retrospective survey of Lurie’s work at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes La Habana, Cuba has been extended until January 28, 2018.

“The majority of the works in this exhibition are entertaining only as an afterthought I believe; their primary intention is to communicate, or more accurately, be a savage experience that owes little to that diplomatic finesse which all commercial art must cultivate. Why? Because serious art in a rather cowardly mass society such as ours must constantly assert to the public that it is motivated by a different purpose than the decorative or simply artful work which is gobbled up by mass-media man without indigestion. We have too much sickness in every compromised area of our lives to need art that soothes.”

Seymour Krim, 1963

**Lyman Allyn Art Museum**

155 West Main Street, New London, CT 06320; (860) 443-2545; www.lymanallyn.org.

**Boris Lurie. “No in Orange”, c. 1962**

Glazed terra cotta, sculptural installation.

The Coral Reef Project (on view through April 15, 2018) is a mixed media exhibit with a unique sculptural installation that demonstrates the fragility of coral and its ecosystem. Featured are studies of coral in oil on canvas, 50 individual coral sculptures arranged to demonstrate a living coral reef, and plaster relief sculptures to represent bleached coral. In addition, didactic materials with coral facts, video of coral by the Ocean Exploration Trust, and an aquarium with living coral from the Credabel Coral Lab will be showcased in the gallery.

**Jacob Lawrence, Tension on the High Seas, tempera on board, 1956.**

*Important works by twentieth-century artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Jacob Lawrence of a scene of the War of 1812 from his 1954-56 series, Büttner and by Einstein in pencil. Bel Prize. Signed by the artist Erich Büttner.*

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**Current Exhibit:** New Year, New Start, works by Gallery Artists, Andrei Kushnir, Michael Banks, Alexander Estévez, Michael Francis, Carol Spils, Stevens Jay Carter and Ross Merrill. Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urb anscape and marine art by accredited, current traditional American painters, many with national reputations.

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Exhibiting our catalogues raisons, posters and ephemera at the Bay Area Book Festival, April 28–29, 2018 in downtown Berkeley.

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things change, and some don’t. Well, maybe. But a history of the appetites can easily make the past seem too much like the present. A lip-smacking world, one can get the right mix of the ingredients, is a world in which some of the essential differences of the past have vanished because the ingredients that give rise to immediacy but the illusion of it, an illusion in which Schama’s heroes under their finery are the same as they have always been: they are bounteous and resourceful, yakkars and machers, schleimets and schnorrers, wearing their heart on their sleeve. We are, in short, in the world of the essential.

In Belonging, this is a faux-Yiddish world that the author too often conveys through pizzazz rather than insight, through a world of Jewish stereotypes that, as several other reviewers have already noted, crop up throughout. Beatriz de Luna is a model of “the modern Jewish matriarch”; Levinas’s “first unapologetically Jewish showman.” Look, the author tells us, like some fairground Barker, here are Jews actually riding a bacchus, here are Jews—or at least had regarded the French Revolution as a solace for Jews, the Enlightenment as a false dawn, Napoleon as another species of tyrant, and the nine-teenth century as the age not of Jewish freedom and emancipation from the ghetto but of new forms of oppression and persecution. It was, in short, a distortion of history, and not an innocent one either, because it served a very modern aim—the demand for a national homeland for the Jews, prefer-ably in the Middle East.

Influential throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Baron’s attack on the lachrymose conception has recently come under fire from a new generation of historians who have been keen to emphasize the omnipres-ence of mass violence against the Jews from ancient to modern times. Belong- ing reflects this trend. In Schama’s tell-ing, Europe suffers from an endemic anti-Semitism. (Much the same could be said of modern-day anti-Semitism, which is not simply anti-Zionist but is rooted in the same historical processes that have shaped Jewish life.)

As his story progresses and the con-vivencia, or coexistence, of Iberia and the Ottoman realms is left behind, it becomes bleaker. By the nineteenth century, the larger story that Schama gave, is not immediately clear that anything good lies ahead.

Now one can easily enough recount the Jewish past as a saga of suffering—there has obviously been plenty of it. But can one also talk about hope after all, can serve more than one pur-pose. The holy books record the collective Jewish memory of the plagues in Egypt and the fugitive across the Red Sea into the Promised Land, the Temple’s destruction and the Babylonian exile. But for centuries, such stories succored not historians but rabbis, and the injuriousness of the past was understood by them primarily as an ethical one.

It was Zakhor (1992), the historian Yosef Yerushalmi’s classic study of the connection between Jewish memory and Jewish history, that highlighted the relatively belated emergence of Jewish historiography. What Yerushalmi brilliantly demonstrated was that the professional historian of the Jews is a modern phenomenon, dating back to Graetz and the mid-nineteenth cen-tury at the earliest. The figure of the historian, it turns out, was another of those things that post-Enlightenment Jews got from their non-Jewish neigh-bors. And it formed part of a larger European obsession with thinking his-torically that was closely connected to the rise of mass politics as well. In short it was a new way of relating to the past that was inseparable from a new hori-zon of expectation in the future.

Not everyone approved. What the Jews did when they embraced the sense of history in the late eighteenth century, wrote the French philosopher Emmanuel Levi-nas, was secularize the messianic promise: tired of waiting for the Messiah, they came to see his arrival as some-thing to be actively pursued. That was political action. It was an attempt to build heaven on earth, and the kind of heaven depended on your politics. It could come about through revolution, dreams, or alternatively by building a socialist or communist utopia in which religious distinctions would lose all meaning. Either way, for Levinas it marked a kind of spiritual and ethi-cial impatience, a misunderstanding of man’s fallen state. Embracing the past, he argues, showed that Jews had lost the capacity to wait for the future that had given their experience its special character, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they gave up on it.

Whatever we make of Levinas’s view, with its own implicit theology of political detachment, he was surely right that the work of Jewish historians reflected a sense of the incapacity to make sense of the future, and a sense of the core of the Jews’ relationship with non-Jews over the centuries. Between them, he tells us, there can be no real trust; the best we can do is to build a new faith born of “pragmatic need.” Not even in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was there anything close to “mutual sympathy.

Belonging ends with Europe’s as-similated Jews dancing on the edge of Upper Austria. But Schama’s work is a testament to the resilience of Jewish life, its capacity for coexistence with the societies of Zionism; and the socialist visions and dreams that ran across the Jewish world before 1900 are but ignored.

In fact, Schama writes as though the fin-de-siècle Jewish world was split into “Good Jews” and “Bad Jews,” the up-per-crust Jews who had sold out and surrendcred to the illusions of European bourgeois civilization and those less ashamed of their roots who luckily stood firm for Zion. A letter he recently co-wrote to The Times of London reveals not only Schama’s Zionism but the view of history that underpins it, its utopianism, its cosmicism. The let-ter was written to deplore the supposed recrudescence of anti-Semitism in the British Labour Party, and in it Schama and his two co-signatories go so far as to suggest that the Labour Party is dis-entangled from anti-Semitism.* That is quite a stretch. The politics aside—that is to say, the politics of using the charge of anti-Semitism as a weapon—stands on its own: it is also not very good history.

For one thing, Jewish anti-Zionism from both socialist and Orthodox per-spectives has always existed as long as Zionism itself, and often rested on a perfectly reasonable critique of Zionist premises that had nothing to do with anti-Semitism. (Much the same could be said of non-Jewish anti-Zionism as well.)

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King Zeno
by Nathaniel Rich.

MC/D Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 386 pp., $28.00

New Orleans is a cliché, a loud, brassy, brazen hussy of a cliché, lubricated with booze and animated by jazz. Tits and beads. Corruption and hurricanes. Thanks to the copious, seasonally ubiquitous marketing efforts of Big Beer, that’s all you know and all you need to know.

And yet New Orleans keeps tempting writers to discover, in archaeological diggs of the heart and the soul, what else is lurking beneath the cliché. Tito and the Teeth, Corruption and hurricanes.

That’s the task Nathaniel Rich sets for himself in King Zeno, a sprawling novel about a pivotal year and a half in the city’s history in 1918–1919. Some New Orleansians, like police detective Bill Bastrop, are returning from World War I, with scars that are barely visible but unerasable. Others, like Beatrice Vizzini, the doyenne of a Sicilian family in a small-time protection racket, are using the opportunity of a croony connection in constructing a new canal to try to move from the “shadow business” to something slightly more legitimate. And Isadore Zeno, a young musician with an ear (and the lips) for legitimate. And Isadore Zeno, a young musician with an ear (and the lips) for

The city’s history in 1918–1919.

The previously prim and comfortable life of New Orleans’ privileged is experiencing terrors. The watering way building, the Industrial Canal, is the first of several attempts to move more closely connect the city with the Gulf of Mexico, to the supposed benefit of commerce and to the ultimate detriment of the wetlands that we’ve learned only recently, as they disappear at the rate of a football field per hour help protect New Orleans from storm surge and hurricane winds. What started in 1918 culminated in the 1960s with the Mississippi River–Gulf Outlet, whose design and failed maintenance both contributed to some of the 2005 flooding.

Several years prior, the city’s trial divide was never textbook southern; New Orleans had the largest population of free people of color before the Civil War, while at the same time serving as the nation’s largest slave market. The free people of color became part of the city’s ruling class, and Creoles learned their lessons from their white brothers well: some Creole social clubs had a “paper bag test” for admission (you could not gain entrance if you were darker than it was). But “just mussel, you still don’t know, started to bridge those divides long before the civil rights movement. Isadore Zeno, who styles himself Slim Izy (but who is granted the sobriquet King Zeno by the real-life bandleader Kid Ory in the same breath that he refuses to hire the youngest), longs for the chance to play his music for white people, to drive them crazy past the point of caring about color.

The city Rich depicts is riven by fear: of the worst flu epidemic in American history, and of crime—specifically, a serial killer given the nom de mort “The Axman” by the local papers because of his intimately brutal choice of weapon. Solved the riddle of the killer’s identity is the driving motivation for Detective Bastrop, who otherwise seems more morose from life by a brutal dose of survivor’s guilt. If, like me, you are bored past tears by police procedurals and crime stories, you are safe here: Bastrop, like Mrs. Vizzini and Izy, their families and co-workers and adversaries, are fully drawn characters caught in the cross-currents of a city already mourning the loss of its nineteenth-century grandeur and trying to imagine what the future holds. Most heartening, no one in the book talks like a New Orleanian: there is no awkward attempt to recreate what these walls have witnessed along a grandeur and trying to imagine what the future holds. Most heartening, no one in the book talks like a New Orleanian: there is no awkward attempt to recreate what these walls have witnessed along a
dilemmas of modern life.

Louis Armstrong, second from right, in the 1947 film New Orleans.

With him are, from left, Zutty Singleton (drums), Red Callender (bass), Kid Ory (trombone), Charlie Beattie (piano), Bud Scott (guitar), and Barney Bigard (clarinet).

1919 Rag
Harry Shearer

over the half-century before the 2005 flood. New Orleans fell back to the living. The city’s history in 1918–1919.

The federal government was not in any danger of being depleted. When you live in New Orleans, you apportion substantially more time for every errand, knowing that someone along the way, friend or stranger, will arrest your progress with a deliciously detailed account of their day, their post-flood recollections. Katrina’s stories turn those stories into a credible and absorbing narrative is still the mandate of New Orleans writers who choose to set their work in their fascinating and infuriating home.

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Written over the course of four decades, François-René de Chateaubriand’s epic autobiography has drawn the admiration of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Proust, Barthes, and Sebald.

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**WHAT THE CITY FEARED, AS IT GAZED AT ITS SUDDEN CONVERSION TO AN INVOLUNTARY VENICE, WERE THE PROBLEMS OF FAILURE, LIKE THE “JACK-O’-LANTERN” EFFECT IN WHICH FEW BUILDINGS TURNED RED AND GENERALLY DARK NEIGHBORHOODS WERE POOMARKED WITH THE OCCASIONAL LIGHTED HOME. IT FEARED DISINVESTMENT, THE EXODUS OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE RETURN OF CRIME. CRIME HAS RETURNED, BUT THE PROBLEMS NEW ORLEANS FACES NOW ARE THOSE OF SUCCESS—LIKE GENTRIFICATION AND THE POSSIBLE ABOLITION OF THE CITY’S DISTINCTIVE SOCIAL CHARACTER.”

What the city feared, as it gazed at its sudden conversion to an involuntary Venice, were the problems of failure, like the “jack-o’-lantern” effect in which few buildings turned red and generally dark neighborhoods were poomarked with the occasional lighted home. It feared disinvestment, the exodus of the intellectual and the return of crime. Crime has returned, but the problems New Orleans faces now are those of success—like gentrification and the possible abolition of the city’s distinctive social character. Ada Colau, the radical mayor of Barcelona—a city not unlike New Orleans in its vibrancy, exuberance, culinary tradition, and complex relationship to the dominant national culture—won election in 2015 by warning that her municipality, experiencing a major upsurge in tourism, risked losing its identity.

The flood, and the exodus, tore at the tightly knit fabric of the community—three generations of a family often lived within blocks of one another. Rising rents have exacerbated that threat to the fabric, upon which depends the survival of many of the city’s unique traditions.

For all that change, the city is still recognizable as New Orleans, as Dan Baum writes in *Nine Lives* (2009), his invaluable portrait of locals pre- and post-flood, a city that lives by neither the dollar nor the clock. The infamous corruption, in the time of King Zeno and today, is ridiculously penny-ante compared with, say, New Jersey or Illinois (although, in fairness, a recent indictment alleges that New Orleans has just joined the million-dollar club in “diverted” public funds). Brutal crime coexists, then as now, with refinement and the lure of easy virtue. Grace.

Despite some new arrivals complaining to police of “noisy musicians coming down the block,” the music lives in clubs and concert venues, but it’s still born and bred in the streets. Despite a world of guitars and DJs, the piano and the trumpet reign. Local musicians, just as in Slim Izy’s time, face a binary choice: they can make a living in the metropolitan truckup, or they can make a living in the street. As a veteran of public meetings, council hearings, and protest gatherings, I marvelled at the discipline and economy of the community meetings that weighed and popularized these reforms: the prospect of civic death really does focus the mind.

Salivating at the “clean slate” they perceived. Down yonder, crucial neighbors and urbanists and urbanists flocked to the stricken city, inviting citizens to hundreds of meetings at which its future would be imagined. The results ended up pretty well: as hefty unread volumes on city officials’ shelves and in front-page stories about neighborhoods that would be “green-dotted”—allowed to return to the hands of their public—surfaced, the citizens of those neighborhoods had different ideas, and LaToya Cantrell, the leader of one such neighborhood movement, has just been elected mayor, one of two African-American women in the runoff. It turns out that the future the people of New Orleans imagined looked a lot like... New Orleans.

Up on the institutional level, things were very different. Three vital local systems—health care, education, and public housing—were subjected to dramatic restructuring with the impetus of the Bush administration, which saw an opportunity to undo “statist” New Deal-era arrangements. It must be noted, in fairness, that state and local officials abetted these reforms.

*The New York Review*
Knowing the Score: What Sports Can Teach Us About Philosophy (And What Philosophy Can Teach Us About Sports) by David Papineau.

Basic Books, 285 pp., $27.00

What We Think About When We Think About Soccer by Simon Critchley.
Penguin, 204 pp., $20.00

In the 1960s, when I was studying philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, we had a regular visiting professor from Yale: an energetic little man who was warm to one can. There wasn’t a subject in philosophy on which he hadn’t written a tome. He was a metaphysician: Reality—capitalized—was his thing.

In 1969, a book came out called Sport: A Philosophical Inquiry. The author was Paul Weiss, our metaphysician from Yale. It was savagely torn apart by the logician and philosopher Joseph Ullian, who called it “tedious, pompous, ill-written” and summed it up as “an unbelievably tiring array of little tidbits of bad analysis.” I had never seen such a scathing review before and probably haven’t since. I liked Weiss, so I decided to read the book and form my own judgment. It immediately became clear that Ullian had a point. This was the kind of book that gives philosophy a bad name: it was pretentious and ponderous and, more disturbingly, had no eye for reality with a small own judgment. It immediately became probably haven’t since. I liked Weiss, so

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Cup by committing a blatant handball, which the referee failed to spot. When Maradona was asked after the game how he had been able to so obviously commit a handball, he rather boastingly retorted: “a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God.”

A plaque, erected in 1895 at Rugby School in England, bears the inscription: “This stone commemorates the exploit of William Webb Ellis who with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time first took the ball in his arms and ran with it thus origin-

ating the distinctive feature of the rugby game. A.D. 1823.” This story is suggestive of the rules in this case led to the inven-

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Papineau’s favorite example of mental

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a stinging loss to her the previous year.

In an interview after her victory, Seles said:

“As: a fifteen-year-old, I couldn’t

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final, my strategy was to just play as

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ality, in other words, has a tendency to

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In addition to his discussions of concentration and confidence, Papineau deals with “chooking” and “the yips.” “‘Choking’ refers to a deterio-

ration in an athlete’s performance in the face of competitive pressure.” In

many cases this happens on the verge of

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an analysis of athletic mental states that

simply rephrases the importance of “positive thinking”: “Athletes need to Have Their Mind Right when com-

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tended plans, and clear their minds of everything else.” Yes, but how? Years ago, the political theorist Jon Elster noticed an important phenomenon he dubbed “essential-by-products.” It does no good to order a dancer to be “spor-
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Papineau devotes a fascinating chapter to the question of how we should react to professional fouls—instances when

players deliberately break the rules—that are not spotted by the officials. First there is a conceptual problem: Does a professional foul mean that the player is not playing the game properly, or at all? Then there is a moral prob-

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Cup, Diego Maradona of Argentina scoring his “hand of God” goal past Peter Shilton of England in the World Cup quarter-finals, Mexico City, June 1986

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Papineau’s breezy attitude toward moralism

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Papineau’s interpretation, though phrased differently, is that the game is defined by implementation of the constitutive rules as recognized by the officials. If they authorized Maradona’s and Henry’s goals, then the goals were ley-

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Philosophers distinguish between two types of rules: regulative and constitutive. The former is a set of instructions for baking one, such instructions are regulative. But the rules of soccer, for example, define and constitute the game. The prohibition against deliberately using one’s hand, for instance, is a constitutive rule. Flouting the rules may mean that the players are not actually playing soccer, whatever else they may be getting away with. The question becomes: By using their hands, were Maradona and Henry still playing soccer?

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—Tim Flannery

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We are also lavishly served with what Vladimir Nabokov once called “cocktails of Schlegel and Hegel (with a dash of Feuerbach).” In Critchley’s case the punch includes a couple of Heidegger’s “within-time-ness” mixed together with “Klopp-time,” named after Jürgen Klopp, the justly celebrated German football manager (recently of Liverpool). There is even a single malt Hegel: “As Hegel might have said, if he’d had the good fortune to think about football, the game is not being-in-itself, but being-for-us, mediated through the spectators and requiring their recognition in order to affirm the players’ existence.”

The book is illustrated with superb black-and-white photos assembled by Mark Ellingham. Some incongruities between the written text and the photographs, according to one unmentioned assumption— are jarring. The opening chapter, for example, is called “Socialism” and explores Critchley’s declaration that socialism is “the proper political and footballing position.” Yet one of the photos included in this section is not a sea of flat caps, cigarettes behind ears, and chips with vinegar in hand. It is calum Blatter, the notoriously corrupt, disgraced former president of FIFA, soccer’s international governing body. During Blatter’s years as head of FIFA, working-class people were priced out of attending matches altogether. To his credit, Critchley is quite aware of this incongruity between the sense of community that unites players and spectators from a first-person point of view. This description gives him license to free-associate and wax lyrical about the game.

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Let’s imagine a street of big houses in the 1930s—deep lawns, servants in the kitchen, and a clear and clean be-
longs and who doesn’t. The paperboy doesn’t. The neighborhood girls may be sweet on Tom Bascomb, but he lives in an ap-
artment building and even at thir-
teen everybody knows that he doesn’t quite fit in. The elderly Dorset siblings do, simply because they always have.
Their ancestors made money in town before moving on to the West, and they belong even though their house lies near ruin and they have grown shabby. Brother and sister are forever speaking of what they’ve sacrificed for each other, and the neighborhood par-
ents find them unspeakable. Yet they wouldn’t dream of keeping their boys and girls from the children’s party the Dorsets give each year; an invitation to that oddly indecent affair has become a way of letting people know from the outset who you were."

"Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time" first appeared in The Kenyon Review and won the 1959 O. Henry Award as the year’s best short story. A print of the Bronzino painting that provides its title hangs on the Dorsets’ wall, and a plaster replica of Rodin’s Kiss sits embowered in an arrangement of paper flowers. The old couple describe their annual evening as a dance, but they’re the only ones ever to take the floor; they waltz beautifully together, too beautifully, and the children know that such a pair shouldn’t. This year’s party will, however, have a surprise, for little Ned and Emily Merrivether have decided to smuggle in their paperboy. They will make Tom pass as if he were Ned, and a farce will ensue in which he will cover Emily’s face with kisses.

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It was also a world Taylor wanted to leave—to go north for college and in Ohio, where they found another of his acolytes, Robert Lowell, a trans-
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A curtain of Green, 491 pp., $37.50


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talking to the girl her son has brought down from New York.

Its real achievement, however, lies in its sense of moral balance, the em- ployed irony of what it depicts a woman up against the limits of her world and her mind, even as it never spares her for having accepted those limits in the first place. In 1985 interview Taylor said that he saw two things when he began to write. One was how consistently black people got the “short end” of the stick. That wasn’t always obvious to writers of his background, and the second thing was less obvious still: the degree to which women got the short end from men. His own impulse was for the reader to understand how other people unlike yourself are,23 and in the 1950s that meant stepping inside their subjectivity with a freedom—a privilege—that few in his position would assume today.

The test case here is a 1951 New Yorker story called “What You Hear from ‘Em?” The question belongs to an old darkies” as well. “What You Hear from ‘Em?” The question belongs to

Taylor had written of his female characters in the third person, but from now on he almost invariably chose the first


40

The New York Review

A PERVERSE AND DELICIOUS TELL-ALL STORY OF THE SOVIET ELITE AND STALIN’S COURT IN 1920S MOSCOW

Perhaps only the impeccably perverse imagination of Curzio Malaparte could have conceived of The Kremlin Ball, which might be described as Proust with the commas of Soviet life. Published posthumously in 1967, this novel, which might be described as Proust in postmodernist, at least as far as

In Malaparte’s vision it is from his nightly opera box, rather than the Kremlin, that Stalin surveys Soviet high society, its scandals and amours and intrigues among beauties and bureaucrats.

This extraordinary court chronicle of Communist life was published posthu- mously and appears now in English for the first time. “Malaparte may just be the original postmodernist, at least as far as genre-crossing is concerned: his journalism reads like fiction, and his fiction like journalism, and no cata- loger can ever be quite sure of where to shelve books such as his best- known work, Kaputt (1944). So it is with this book, which he prefaced with the remark that ‘in this novel... everything is true: the people, the events, the things, the places...’

A head-swirling kaleidoscope that, though fictional, is never for a moment fictitious.” —Kirkus Reviews

THE KREMLIN BALL
Curzio Malaparte

A new translation from the Italian and with an introduction by Jenny McPhee
Paperback: $15.95 On sale April 10th Also by Curzio Malaparte

KAPUTT

Afterword by Dan Hofstadter
Introduction by Rachel Kushner

THE SKIN
 Translated by Cesare Falongo

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40

The New York Review
The Afterlives of Specimens: Science, Mourning, and Whitman’s Civil War
by Lindsay Tuggle
University of Iowa Press, 254 pp., $65.00 (paper)

Dram- Taps: The Complete 1865 Edition
by Walt Whitman, edited by Lawrence Kramer.
New York Review Books, 170 pp., $14.00 (paper)

Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century had no sure prospect of resting in peace. If their bodies weren’t embalmed for public viewing or dug up for medical dissection, their bones were liable to be displayed in a museum. In some cases, their skin was used as book covers by bibliophiles and surgeons with a taste for human-hide binding.

The preservation, exhumation, and exhibition of human remains become, in the hands of the literary critic Linda S. Tuggle, an illuminating basis for a provocative reassessment of America’s foremost poet, Walt Whitman. In The Afterlives of Specimens, Tuggle aligns Whitman’s life and work with the practice of preserving and learning from cadavers or body parts during the Civil War era. She offers new insights into Whitman’s poetics of the body, both by limning the history of body preservation and by considering his development using the work of various psychologists and literary theorists, including Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Whitman, long recognized for his candid treatment of the body and sexuality, was also the quintessential poet of disability and death. As a volunteer nurse in the Civil War hospitals in Washington, D.C., he visited, according to his own estimate, between 80,000 and 100,000 wounded or sick soldiers over the course of four years. He typically went twice a day to the hospitals, walking from cot to cot, tending to the soldiers, giving them food or small gifts, reading to them, writing letters for them, or sitting quietly by their side. Although his daily visits took a toll on him (he developed tuberculosis during the war), he got pleasure—including, it appears, homoerotic arousal—from his encounters with soldiers who stoically faced death or permanent disability.

Whitman was also inspired by the war to write new poetry. In the early spring of 1865, he arranged to publish a collection, Drum-Taps, that was delayed due to Lincoln’s assassination in April and appeared along with a sequel later that year. This volume contains the finest Civil War poetry we have. Its republication as Drum- Taps: The Complete 1865 Edition, expertly introduced and annotated by Lawrence Kramer, is most welcome. Since Whitman dispersed his war poems, often heavily edited, throughout later editions of his magnum opus Leaves of Grass, these poems have previously been available to general readers only in truncated, scattered form. Kramer’s edition of the original 1865 Drum- Taps and its sequel restores Whitman’s immediate creative response to the war that killed more than 750,000 Americans and injured at least 500,000 others—more Americans than in all other wars combined.

Some poems in Drum- Taps look unblinkingly at the horror of war. In one, Whitman describes his work as a hospital nurse:

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood, Back on his pillow the soldier bends, with curv’d neck, and side-falling head; His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump, And has not yet looked on it.

The poem’s speaker next tends to “a wound in the side, deep, deep,” and to one that festers “with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive.”

In another poem, Whitman describes a battlefield strewn with corpses; the moon shines down “on faces ghostly, swollen, purple;/On the dead, on their backs, with their arms tossed wide.” In the poignant “Vigil Strange I kept on the field one night,” a soldier sits all night by the body of a fallen comrade, then wraps it in a blanket and buries it.

The sheer physicality of death and disability in the Civil War, accentuated in graphic battlefield photographs taken by Matthew Brady and others, leads Tuggle to identify a pattern in Whitman’s literary career, which she follows across the six editions of Leaves of Grass and the late prose works, with the war writings as her main focus—an apt choice, since according to the poet, “my book and its sequel are the war.” Tuggle shows that before the war Whitman emphasized the chemical transformation of the interred body into new life. He writes in the first edition of Leaves of Grass (1855): “And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me. I smell the white rose sweet-scented and growing.” Tuggle links this notion of organic regeneration with Whitman’s prewar criticism of body-snatching—which occurred frequently in this period.

The sudden surfact of cadavers during the Civil War, Tuggle contends, corresponded to a notable change in Whitman’s approach to the human body. Instead of compost for new growth, the body became a specimen for public exhibition and scientific analysis. Tuggle notes how important the term “specimen” became for Whitman, who wrote of “thousands of specimens of first-rate Heroes” among soldiers he visited. He described “a specimen army hospital case… Lorenzo Strong, Co. A, 9th United States Cavalry,” with his right leg amputated, “the perfect specimen of physique—one of the most magnificent I ever saw”; a New Hampshire soldier with “gangrene of the feet, a pretty bad case: a regular specimen of an old-fashioned, rude, hearty New England country man”; and a New Yorker, “a regular specimen of youthful physical manliness—shot through the lungs—ininitely dying.”

At the same time, Tuggle informs us, medical analysts analyzed human specimens: corpses, body parts, and bones. Especially striking is her account of the Army Medical Museum in Washington, D.C., begun in 1862 and curated by the surgeon John H. Brinton, who collected the bones of soldiers killed in the Civil War and put them on display, with identifying labels. One of Whitman’s first sights in Washington that year was “a heap of amputated feet, arms, legs, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart” sitting outside a war hospital. These were the kinds of specimens that Brinton gathered, cleaned, and displayed. He presented the bones as evidence of the effect of new weaponry, such as the powerful bullet known as the musket ball, and as mementoes of the war and its martyrs.

It was considered a noble gesture, Tuggle reveals, for a soldier to contribute the remains of a dead comrade to Brinton “for the good of the country.” The bones of four soldiers Whitman had visited in the hospital were on display in the museum, which fed the curiosity of sensation-seekers even as it created a memorial of the war. One journalist called it “a museum of horrors” but recognized its appeal: “Its many bones, which have survived their painful sheaths of mortal flesh, all cool and clean, and rehung on golden threads, are not unpleasant to behold.”

Human remains became such an overwhelming presence during the war that Whitman suggests that the earth is incapable of absorbing them. In both his poetry and his prose, Tuggle writes, “Whitman shifted from a focus on cyclical regeneration (‘composting’) toward a poetics of preservation (‘embalming’).” She points out that Civil War doctors and museum curators, as in the case of the assassinated Lincoln, whose corpse was drained of blood and injected with fluid that reinscribed his death as “the death of stone,” as a reporter put it. In this condition Lincoln’s body made its twelvemonth, 1,700-mile train journey from the nation’s capital to Springfield, Illinois, viewed by millions of Americans when it stopped in many cities along the way.

Whitman’s war writings, according to Tuggle, performed a similar service of embalming both the president and the myriad of fallen soldiers as specimens that remained in the poet’s sad memory. “Embalming” not only describes his literary preservation of the war in the retrospective poems and prose he wrote during the postbellum decades, but it also appears as a metaphor. For instance, in the 1890 poem “A Twilight Song,” written toward the end of his life, Whitman says of the war dead: “Your mantle of unknown names, or North or South. Embalm’d with love in this twilight song.”

Tuggle thoughtfully analyzes Whitman’s experience of mourning, in

Walt Whitman and his rebel soldier friend Pete Doyle, Washington, D.C., 1865

March 22, 1865

Fine Specimens
David S. Reynolds

Leaves of Grass (1855): “And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me. I smell the white rose sweet-scented and growing.” Tuggle links this notion of organic regeneration with Whitman’s prewar criticism of body-snatching—which occurred frequently in this period. The sudden surfact of cadavers during the Civil War, Tuggle contends, corresponded to a notable change in Whitman’s approach to the human body. Instead of compost for new growth, the body became a specimen for public exhibition and scientific analysis. Tuggle notes how important the term “specimen” became for Whitman, who wrote of “thousands of specimens of first-rate Heroes” among soldiers he visited. He described “a specimen army hospital case… Lorenzo Strong, Co. A, 9th United States Cavalry,” with his right leg amputated, “the perfect specimen of physique—one of the most magnificent I ever saw”; a New Hampshire soldier with “gangrene of the feet, a pretty
which melancholia, nostalgia, and the poet’s physical decline (he was forty-one when the war began) were intertwined. With regard to Whitman’s “soldiers-soldiers,” she writes that “as symbols of embodied mourning, Whitman’s specimens conjure psychic and physical attachments that were, melancholically, sublime.”

This approach illuminates a number of the original war poems as they appear in Kramer’s edition of Drum-Taps. The poems in the volume, after all, are the portraits of the maimed or the dead; verses about the shuttering effect of battlefield losses on family members; vignettes of soldiers in battle or on the march bivouacked on a hillside. These poems are more than realistic or poetic—adjectives normally used to describe them. They are not just physically precise, but alive with the sights, sounds, and smells of war.

The vividness of poems like “The Veteran’s vision” (about the “grime, heat, rush” of battle), “A sight in camp in the evening,” “The Road Not Taken” (about the “grime, heat, dust”), “A sight in camp in the evening,” “The Road Not Taken” (about the “grime, heat, dust”), “All the seamen and the landsmen, all the masters with their slaves, Pioneers! O pioneers!” Drum-Taps, then, has as much to do with Whitman’s politics as it does with the preservation of human specimens of the war. The poems in the volume also lead us to question Tuggle’s argument that his focus on composting and regeneration was replaced by the preservationist theme of embalming. Actually, Whitman’s 1855 motif of the corpse as compost reappears in Drum-Taps, as when the poet describes Nature Mother calling on the earth to absorb fallen soldiers’ bodies: “Absorb them well, O my earth, she cries— I charge you, lose not my sons! lose not an atom.” The speaker invokes the soil, the streams, the rivers, and the roots of trees to transform soldiers’ corpses into future vegetation and air: “Exhale me them centuries hence—breathe me their breath—let not an atom be lost.../Exhale them perennial, sweet death, years, centuries hence.”

Not only does Whitman in Drum-Taps retain his belief in the organic recycling of bodies; he also pays homage to the soul. On the body/soul issue Tuggle does a deft dance. She discusses Whitman in a public discussion, Whitman asked Ingersoll, “What would this life be without immortality?... If the spiritual is not behind the material, to what purpose is the material?” He addressed these questions privately by telling his companion, poet-novelist, “I am not prepared to admit fraud in the scheme of the universe—yet without immortality all would be sham and sport of the most transient nature.”

Among the poems in Drum-Taps is “Chanting the Square Deitific,” about religion. The poem describes four currents of one’s knowledge: like the Old Testament’s Jehovah; as a loving console, such as Christ; as Satan, the fallen God; and as what Whitman calls “Santa SPIRITA,” the “essence of form—of matter,. . . of the identities permanent, positive... the most solid” of realities. Santa Spirita, the deathless essence within all humans, is what Whitman champions. In a later poem about religion, “Eidolons,” the poet reaffirms his faith, insisting upon a spiritual reality behind everything. He describes the eidolon as “Thy body permanent,/The body lurking there within thy body./The only purport of the form thou art, the real I myself./An image, an eidolon.” In 1891, the year before he died, Whitman published the poem “Sail Out for Good, Eidolon Yacht!,” which contains the lines:

Depart, depart from solid earth—
No more returning to these shores,
Now on for awe our infinite free
Spurning all yet tried ports, seas,
hawser, densities, gravitation,
Sail out for good, eidolon yacht of me!

In Whitman’s cosmic view, then, the decomposed body nurtures physical life while the soul sails on an eternal journey.

By the “afterlives of specimens” in Tuggle’s Drum-Taps we mean the presence of bodies or body parts, either as phantom limbs, preserved corpses, museum exhibits, or traumatic sights of war that haunt the poet. Tuggle suggests that Whitman conflates the spiritual with the physical. She writes, “Like [the amputee] Lewy Brown’s lost toes, for Whitman the body and the soul are ‘impossible to disentangle.’

We should keep in mind, however, that the meta-

Figure 5: Whitman's design for his tomb, Harleigh Cemetery, Camden, New Jersey, circa 1890

Walt Whitman’s design for his tomb, Harleigh Cemetery

42 The New York Review
A Flag Is a Flag Is a Flag

March 22, 2018

Jason Farago

Johns would go on to paint or draw more than three dozen flags. White Flags, painted in 1955 and now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is larger, ten feet by six and a half, and the flag painted on transparent paper beneath its whitewash-out surface thanks to the collaged papers and a subtle use of charcoal. Gray Flag, from 1957, is even closer to a monochrome. There were double flags and triple flags, flags with forty-eight stars and fifty-five flags made from encaustic oil paint and metal and in one case Sculp-Metal, paintings, equipped between image and object, invention and preexistence, have a continuing art historical and critics—unsure of whether they stood for the United States and what sort of political orientation Johns imagined for them. (Only once, for a 1969 poster for the Moratorium Committee to End the War in Vietnam, did Johns produce a flag with a clear partisan aim. It had green and black stripes and an orange button.) It has also become a commonplace, in the sixty years since Johns painted the first Flag, for critics to bemoan how much wider the gap has grown between the ideals of America and the country’s brutal realities. But no critic until this past year has had to contend with Johns’s flags when the very survival of the American republic was in doubt, and when America’s economic power, cultural influence, and geopolitical clout were so clearly in decline. The mythology of Jasper Johns, after all, has always been predicated on the primacy of American art as the postwar successor to European modernism—and critics will have to reckon anew with postwar American art if American primacy becomes a thing of the past.

How much has changed, politically, historically, aesthetically, since Johns’s dream? And how best to come to grips with him? The Royal Academy show proposed a thematic study, opening with a remarkable trio of paintings—a Target from 1961, the crosshatched Within from 1983, and the barren, agglutinative interior scene Racing Thoughts, from the same year—and the present about 150 works grouped by themes of time, objects, the seasons, and memory. I suspect, however, that the just-the-facts style of a catalogue raisonné—what was painted, in what order, out of what materials; where was it shown, by whom was it acquired, and where is it now—actually offers a better introduction to his poker-faced art. Johns has been a favorite subject of philosophers of aesthetics, psychoanalytically engaged critics, and queer theorists with a detective streak, but his art resists disentanglement, and his signs and symbols never fully reflect any biographical source or intellectual underpinning. (“I don’t know how to have thoughts,” he told The Guardian in 2004.) Even Johns’s disclosure of the dreams that predate his earliest of revelations. The painting may have sprung from his deepest unconscious, but what does that reveal, other than that even he cannot say what it means?

Johns was born in 1930 in Augusta, Georgia; he had a difficult childhood. His parents divorced, and he grew up among an extended family in segregated South Carolina. At twelve, months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he never met a scrap metal drive, the prize for which was a new American flag for his school. As a child he had little exposure to art, but he drew incessantly, and before he was out of his teens his teachers encouraged him to go to New York, where he enrolled at Parsons, then dropped out, did odd jobs, and barely got by. He saw the paintings of Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, and the other Abstract Expressionists before being drafted in 1951. He served for two years, though never in Korea; most of his service took place back in South Carolina, at Fort Jackson, where he trained in heavy artillery and organized art exhibitions on the base, including of his own (now destroyed) war art. Back in New York, he worked nights as a clerk in a bookstore that specialized in art publications, and he saw countless exhibitions and performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. The leading galleries were still dominated by Abstract Expressionism. In Willem de Kooning’s garish squiggles, Newman’s abysmal zips, and the last of Pollock’s trickles, advanced American painting took the form of confident, gestural nonobjectivity. Johns has often been misread as the graveur of Abstract Expressionism, and he and Rauschenberg were frequently called “neo-Dadaists,” a misnomer that stemmed from their interest in Dada and the dissolution of the distinction between art and life. In fact, Johns had an only cursory knowledge of Dada in the early 1950s. Hart, we won’t meet a scrap metal drive until the end of the decade. He was, however, a keen student of de Kooning, Newman, and particularly Jack Tworkov, whose brushy gestures were more contained and reserved than de Kooning’s and Pollock’s blasts. Yet Johns found that he couldn’t perform Abstract Expressionism’s emotional theatrics; he was too reserved for that. “I didn’t want my work to be an exposure of my feelings,” he explained in 1973. A work of art, for the young Johns, had to have meaning and importance independent of the artist’s personality. A flag is two-dimensional, abstract in most cases, and, unless you are Napoléon, rectangular. But had it not been for the Ab-Exers’ practice of decriminalizing compositional elements into an all-over pattern, Johns might never have developed his materially and metaphorically—of depicting the Stars and Stripes across the entirety of the picture plane, such as Flag, that the art historian Fred Ortien has written, “both
Jasper Johns: Three Flags, 1958

represents its subject and is the subject represented.” The breakthrough of the flag, in other words, was not that it depicted a preexisting object as if it were in the present. Rather, it violated the whole distinction between pictures and objects; the symbol and the materials that constituted it were one and the same. (Of course, the Rauschenbergian Bernstein cunningly refers to this first painting as both Flag and “the flag,” in lowercase and without italics, as if to gently subvert the same equivocal position would hold with Johns’s subsequent targets and maps, all of which, as she writes, “seemed to blatantly renounce the viability of the dominant medium.”)

“Things the mind already knows,” as the artist called them, were Johns’s escape routes from the dead end of “Takai” abstract. Do send in the late 1950s and early 1960s he would rely on familiar symbols or everyday objects to dismantle expectations of unitary meaning, and personal expression too. The digits 0 through 9, painted in encaustic or stenciled in sequential grids, take on abstract form even as they still express numerical values, though in a few paintings, such as 0 Through 9 (1960), the ten digits are overlaid upon one another, their curves and straight edges just barely intelligible amid red, orange, and light-blue stains. He also turned to sculpture, casting bronze lightbulbs and flashlights, or molding cans of beer or his own brushes in a coffee can, then painting the surfaces to create uncanny replicas. Like the flags and targets, these were not straight readymades in the manner of Marcel Duchamp’s bicycle wheel, bottle rack, or urinal, which Johns saw for the first time around 1958; they were, instead, sculptures that took the form of preexisting objects. John’s anti-illusionism also led him to treat paintings as objects in themselves, as standing in need of rulers and dragging them across the surface, or by splitting a composition across multiple canvases and emphasizing the spaces between them. Objects in the real world are not mere works of art or objects (art remains objects) through a sequence of undefined procedures, as expressed in Johns’s most mythologized formulation: “Do something to it. Do something else to it.”

One part of John’s career that was not mythologized until recently was his relationship with Robert Rauschenberg—his collaborator, his studio mate, his first great critic, and his lover, though even today museums and books are sometimes loath to say so. Their love began in the early 1950s, when Johns was nineteen years older, divorced, with a son. When they met he’d already shown at Betty Parsons and Cunningham and John Cage during the 1950s. The crosshatched paintings of the 1970s are fugues played on the ruins of modernism, their homogenous surfaces and nicks repeating and weaving across the canvas, and often obscuring designs beneath. Bernstein notes that the crosshatches are the first Johns paintings that can be properly called abstract, though they are more like drawings than the gestural abstractions of Pollock or Tworkov, and they bristle with citations from Matisse, Picasso, the Surrealists, and other early-twentieth-century figures. Later he found a surprising resonance in an artist he loved: Edward Hopper, whose late Self-Portrait Between the Clock and the Bed begins in 1981 (two of which were in the Royal Academy) retains the all-over, nearly Abstract Expressionist quality, and objects; the symbol and the mate-...
In 2008, on the occasion of his all-gray retrospective at the Metropolitan Mu-
seum of Art, Johns told The New York Times that “artists today know more. They
are aware of the market more than they once were. There seems to
be something in the air that art is com-
mencement itself.” And he was right. Young-
sters, thrust into an art world richer than
ever (and a New York where studio
space to squatter living in, where art, and
are now largely out of reach), have had
no choice but to get smart about the eco-
nomics of art. The result has been that
any remaining formalist commit-
tment to the autonomy of painting or
sculpture is now well and truly dead;
these days, the white cube offers no es-
cape from the world outside.
Johns was himself one of the un-
der-takers of an autonomous sphere of
art, so central to the development of
modernism. He invited you to salute his
art, which both exulted and condemned,
when most of New York still defended
art for art’s sake. Art’s use value and
exchange value were also on his mind
when he made his painted sculptures of
beer cans, after de Kooning snapped,
apropos Castelli, that “you could give
that son-of-a-bitch two beer cans and
he could sell them.” But there are rela-
tive degrees of autonomy and contin-
gency, and as Johns himself admits,
the artists that have followed him work
commercial conditions he never had to face. To anyone under forty, the
autonomy he claimed looks more and
more like a lost privilege, a luxury
we would give anything to regain.
Is it a painting or is it a flag? The
question sounds practically quaint sixty
years on—when art is encountered
more and more on touchscreens and in
social feeds, and when the market and
other art institutions have more power
to shape the art-world experience than
they did in Johns’s day. But the
question. Johns found a way to make
a painting both a picture and an object.
Today every single painting has that
double role, and must function, as the
art historian Mark Godfrey has sug-
gested, “as a dynamic form that arises out
of circulation.” It was that, more than any
heartickness for lost American ide-
als (only recently was it reported that
Morris’s research assistant assured
him that he felt certain that Morris
would confess that the death of 
Frank Olson] would be affirmed, and additional
Soviet-era documents actually took part in the program,” and
highlight other shortcomings of experi-
ments of such limited scope and duration.
On a separate note, Mr. Benjamin Strau-
mann, of the Institute for International
Law at the University of Bonn, has
called to my attention that the 2016
national referendum on a universal basic income in Switzerland was in fact not “nonbinding,” as I (fol-
lowing Van Parijs and Vanderborght)
has indicated. The voted failed, and by a wide
deficit (74 to 26 percent) for the “no” side.
What is disturbing about all this is that
it seems to have become lost knowledge.
Roughly forty years after the end of this huge,
 expensive, attention to the
NIT, Van Parijs and Vanderborght, and Friedman,
see to have forgotten. Mention “guaranteed
annual income” to almost any economist today,
and he or she will talk about disincentives to
work. Yet the primary conclusions of all five
experiments of the US government in the
late 1960s until the 1970s were given
more opportunities to choose what type of
work they did, resulting in fewer incidents of
poverty and crime. What’s disturbing about all this is that
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