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Front Cover: Detail of Anna Sebastian, *What We May Also Do*,
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A.M. Juster's most recent book, *Girlatee* (Paul Dry Books 2025), is his first children's book. His translation of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which closely matches the rhyme and meter of the original text, is due in April from W.W. Norton.

Roger Frank Malina is an artscience researcher, educator, editor, and astrophysicist. He co-founded the UT Dallas Bass School ArtSciLab and the Center for Emergence Studies, which have enabled close collaboration between scientists and artists, and other hybrid projects that require science of team science methods; developed data performance and transdisciplinary research and apprenticeships; and built an observatory to detect and emergent phenomena at UT Dallas. He is a former NASA principal investigator for the University of California Berkeley Extreme Ultraviolet Explorer satellite, a former CNRS Director at the Observatoire Astronomique de Marseille Provence in Marseille, and is Executive Editor of Leonardo Publications at MIT Press. He holds a BS in Physics from MIT (1972), a PhD in Astronomy from UC Berkeley (1979), and an Honorary Doctorate from the Polytechnic University of Valencia, and the Ars Electronica Golden Nika for collective work through *Leonardo*.

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Frederick Turner's science fiction epic poems led to his being a consultant for NASA's long-range futures group, through which he met Carl Sagan and other space scientists. He received Hungary's highest literary honor for his translations of Hungarian poetry with the distinguished scholar and Holocaust survivor Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, won Poetry's Levinson Prize, and has often been nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. Born in England, raised in Africa by his anthropologist parents Victor and Edie Turner, and educated at Oxford University, he is also known as a Shakespearean scholar, a leading theorist of environmentalism, an authority on the philosophy of Time, and the poet laureate of traditional Karate. He is the author of about 40 books, ranging from literary monographs through cultural criticism and science commentary to poetry and translations. He has taught at UC Santa Barbara and Kenyon College, edited the *Kenyon Review*, and is presently Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas. Recent publications include *Apocalypse: An Epic Poem*, Baen Books (ebook) and Ilium Press (hardback and paperback), 2016; *More Light: Selected Poems*, 2004-2016, Mundus Artium Press, 2017; *The Golden Goblet: Selected Poems of Goethe*, translated and edited by Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, Deep Vellum Press, 2019; *Goethe's Faust*, part 1, translated and edited by Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Ozsvath, Deep Vellum Press, 2020; and *Latter Days* (poems), Franciscan University Press, 2022.

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1 Art Worlds

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1 ART WORLDS

The Cart Pulling the Horse
Artists, Capitalists, and Saint-Simon's Theory of the Avant-Garde

Pierre d'Alancaisez

I RECENTLY RAN ACROSS A COUPLE OF OLD acquaintances, both leaders at minor British art schools. The conversation quickly turned to the lamentable state of arts higher education. Despite their valiant efforts to reform and defend their institutions, the job of training new artists has become a managerial nightmare. Capitalism's assault on the very idea of art was succeeding. Preparing a new generation for the battle is now harder but more important than ever. If not artists, one of my friends rhetorically inquired, who might ever break the ever-tightening noose of capital?

I was puzzled by this projection. Not because I do not recognize the decline of the art school but because I didn't understand how my colleagues could complain about the institution's rot when it is they who are in charge of it.[1] Who, if not educators, turned art academies into factories of personal debt, gave birth to the myth of the "creative industries," and is seeding demonstrably indefensible political positions in the minds of young artists?

Blaming "neoliberal capitalism" seemed like a cop-out. Turning from detective into prosecutor, I wondered if it were not, in fact, artists themselves who invited capitalism into their studio, earmarking its every weakness for cooptation, commercialization, and neutralization. This was a slanderous charge, and my colleagues were not amused. Did I mean to suggest that everything that is politically useful in art eventually turns against itself because rather than instead of artists' best intentions?

The mechanism bears re-examining. We are familiar with narratives, popularized in the 20th century by the likes of Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, that position artists as agents of the common good who battle against the politics of oppression which rages beyond art.[2] We know, from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and more recently Mark Fisher, that capital subsumes art's resistance and turns it into a commodity that entraps both producers and consumers in a vicious cycle.[3] Numerous

1 Pierre d'Alancaisez, "Say No to Art School," petitpoi.net, 7 August 2022, petitpoi.net/say-no-to-art-school-manifesto.

2 Walter Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, trans. J. A Underwood, 2008; Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

3 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002); Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Lanham: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), chap. 2.

artistic accounts, like Hans Haacke's or Hito Steyerl's, critique the corrupting influence that art collectors and patrons have on artists and art institutions.[4]

While multiple accounts of the co-optation of critical artistic initiatives have emerged over the past century, they, broadly, presuppose that the political initiative lies with the artist. Without using the term, they are invested in the notion of the avant-garde, that is the profound emancipatory potential of novel artistic practices. In describing the state of the art world today, they agree that historic avant-garde movements failed when their aesthetics became detached from their politics, or when the politics itself became corrupted. This fracture affects aesthetic movements.[5] The critic Benjamin Buchloh, for example, condemned neo-avant-garde formations such as Abstract Expressionism for sacrificing their politics to the cultural industry's commercial rewards.[6] Organizational formations, likewise, are susceptible to perversion. Marc James Léger critiqued the crassly commercial proliferation of international art biennials in 2014 when only a decade earlier, these events had been heralded as critical tools for social and economic development through the popularization of contemporary art.[7]

My art school colleagues are familiar with these accounts, and they are invested in them. The notion that an elite group could lead the social transformation of their field, if not society at large, is compelling, not least for the elite itself. It doesn't seem to unsettle their commitment that the political successes of art's vanguardist tendencies have been few and far between (Buchloh, for example, looks as far back as Dada and Surrealism for a victory).

The problem with this view of art as politically positive, and capital as the oppressive villain, is that it allows for a friend-enemy separation between the spheres of the art world and beyond. Art liberates, capital oppresses. Art forges new paths, capital bulldozes them. Artists have ideas, capital steals them. This is a death spiral. But when capital's subversion of vanguardist ideas catches up with the artist, the theory spurs him on into another doomed leap.

There have been attempts at nuance, of course. The theorist Peter Bürger, for example, understood vanguardism in quasi-class terms as a challenge to art's bourgeois tendencies, instilling an opposition between political art and what he confusingly termed "autonomous" practice.[8] The later trend of institutional critique provided an alternative narrative which critiqued the art institution from within, yet somehow evaded responsibility for its conduct. It was epitomized by the artist Andrea Fraser (Figure 1)[9], who came closer than any of her peers to suggesting that artists were implicated in capital's work. Political theorists like David Graeber, meanwhile, have critiqued the idea of vanguardism altogether, promoting instead horizontal modes of political organizing.[10]

Art has been so unsuccessful at outpacing capital's hostile mimicry that the idea of the avant-garde has lost its critical appeal. But even if the terminology has changed,

4 Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, 1971, photograph, 1971, whitney.org/collection/works/29487; Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (New York: Verso, 2017).

5 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 12. print (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985).

6 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "'Theorizing the Avant-Garde'," *Art in America*, November 1984.

7 Marc James Léger, "'Art and Art History After Globalisation'," *Third Text* 26, no. 5 (September 2012): 515–27, doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2012.712767.

8 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1984], 2016).

9 Andrea Fraser, "'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique'," *Artforum International*, 2005.

10 David Graeber, "'The Twilight of Vanguardism'," The Anarchist Library, 2003, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-graeber-the-twilight-of-vanguardism.

Figure 1 Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), video still of performance. Courtesy Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin. Copyright: Andrea Fraser. Photo: © Tate

the understanding of art and capital as antagonists prevails. This is the assumption, in my colleague's description of the art school's downfall, to which I objected. To challenge it, I want to rehabilitate the idea of an avant- garde from a different source. Not the avant-garde of Constructivism or Dada promoted by Buchloh, but the often-misremembered 1825 origin of the term in the writings of the social theorist Henri Saint-Simon.[11]

Two centuries on, Saint-Simon's historical circumstances bear some resemblance to the conditions that drive aspects of the art world today. Working in the shadow of the French Revolution and at the dawn of industrial transformation, the theorist attempted to construct a technocratic state socialism that would cater to the interests of a broad industrial class which included workers and capitalists. Like many thinkers today, he wanted to dissolve the barriers between art, politics, and life and reserved a special leadership role for artists in designing the social settlement.

For Saint-Simon, artists would be the avant-garde—literally the advanced reconnaissance branch—of a triumvirate of artists, scientists, and industrialists that shaped the state. In his view, the cooperation of all these three spheres was necessary for sustainable human development. Artists would be the essential visionaries who ensured that knowledge and industry followed the path of progress, providing inspiration and creativity in the service of knowledge and action. In this utopian integralist vision, the avant-garde was not opposed to capital: it was industry's most trusted partner.

11 Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, *Opinions Littéraires, Philosophiques et Industrielles*. (Paris: Bossange père, 1825), 341, ark.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31285249m.public.

Figure 2 documenta fifteen: Jatiwangi art Factory, New Rural Agenda Summit, June 21, 2022. Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany. Photo: Martha Friedel.

Saint-Simon's master plan is rarely invoked today but his vision of the willing synergy between art and capital has, indeed, come true. The 2022 edition of Documenta, the art world's most significant event held every five years in Kassel, vindicated the French thinker. This show was an ambitious attempt to introduce vanguardist new forms of practice in the global art community. Without admitting so, it oriented art to capital in ways envisaged by Saint-Simon.

The exhibition was organized along ostensibly non-hierarchical principles by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa who invited countless other artists and collective to join them in a project named lumbung after a practice of collective agriculture (Figure 2).[12] Many participants came from parts of the so-called Global South which are not yet formally incorporated into the infrastructure of the global art world.[13] The 100-day, city -wide project promised to workshop novel ways of political organizing, friendly cooperation, and artistic co-creation that might inspire self-governing development in the formerly unincorporated parts of the art world. The vision promised to make real the political horizontality championed by Graeber.

Marking the peak of the Western art world's obsession with decolonization, lumbung hoped to induce a grassroots-democratic shock in the art world. Reception at the opening in Kassel, however, was mixed and reflected the amorphous project's confused

12 Samanth Subramanian, "A Radical Collective Takes Over One of the World's Biggest Art Shows," *The New York Times*, 9 June 2022, sec. Magazine, www.nytimes.com/2022/06/09/magazine/ruangrupa-documenta.html.

13 Artnet News, "Thousands of Artists Are Participating in Documenta 15. Here's the Most Comprehensive List to Date," Artnet News, 15 June 2022, news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-list-documenta-15-2130911.

and poorly articulated political principles.[14] *lumbung's* subaltern masses were to be at once inspiring indigenous sages and debtors in the bank of Western liberalism. A public relations crisis soon unfolded over accusations of antisemitism in a small number of the show's thousands of artworks.[15] The scandal was so severe that despite playing host to hundreds of art activists and dozens of events and actions, *lumbung* realized little of its vanguardist promise.

Examined from the perspective of capital, however, the project was an unmitigated success. Gossip had it that ruangrupa was once supported by the Ford Foundation and that, therefore, its supposedly grassroots, non-Western political instincts were the fabrications of a culturally imperialist NGO. This kind of arrangement isn't unusual, but the issue didn't stop there. I discovered that ruangrupa and other *lumbung* participants were closely tied to the Dutch grant-giving foundation DOEN. This NGO seconded its program manager Gertrude Flentge to Documenta 15's curatorial board, and the foundation itself appeared on the project's website as an artistic collaborator rather than a sponsor.[16] The relationship between the funder and the artistic groups had been nothing short of incestuous for years, with the artists and the funder taking turns singing each other's praises.[17]

The most insidious aspect of the project was the difficulty of discerning whether *lumbung's* core ideas originated in ruangrupa's Jakarta art center or DOEN's corporate headquarters in Amsterdam. Was the exhibition in Kassel a cruel opportunity for Global South art aspirants to market their vulnerabilities to Western capital in return for their incorporation into the liberal art canon? Were Indonesian intellectuals foregoing their sovereignty in the name of progress mapped out by the West?

The problem with the view of art as politically positive, and capital as the oppressive villain, is that it allows for a near-Manichean separation between the spheres of the art world and beyond.

The relationship between ruangrupa and DOEN entirely discredited any reading of *lumbung* as non-hierarchical. The antisemitism scandal, however, entirely occluded these aspects of the project. Hardly anyone noticed that *lumbung* was the apex achievement of Western cultural imperialism. Contrary to the organizers' statements, Documenta 15 was not a radical political art project devised by artists and merely sponsored by benevolent capitalists keen to "artwash" their reputations. No, *lumbung* was a research mission mounted by a consortium of artists from the Global South and their Western counterparts who are experts in the development of grassroots

14 Pierre d'Alancaisez, "Decentralised Non-Autonomous Organisation," *Petitpoi.Net* (blog), 19 June 2022, petitpoi.net/decentralised-non-autonomous-organisation.

15 Catherine Hickley, "New Antisemitism Scandal Hits Documenta as Panel Member Resigns," The Art Newspaper, 14 November 2024, www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/11/14/new-anti-semitism-scandal-hits-documenta-as-panel-member-resigns.

16 "Artistic Team: Gertrude's Story," documenta fifteen, accessed 5 October 2022, documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/artistic-team-gertrudes-story. "Announcement of Further Invited Participants by the Lumbung Members and Artists of Documenta Fifteen," documenta fifteen, 2022, documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/announcement-of-further-invited-participants-by-the-lumbung-members-and-artists-of-documenta-fifteen.

17 *Walkie Talkie #2* (Gudskul, 2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeJeV3_ugYA.

infrastructures for ideological propagation. Their work was underwritten by quasi-charitable organizations whose raison d'être is the expansion of capitalism as the ideology of human development. The project's key outcome was the extension of Western cultural capital hegemony to many previously unenfranchised constituencies.

What if avant-garde artists are the master planners of capital hegemonies and not merely conformists?

Such talk is off-limits in the art world, however. As I unsuccessfully pitched my critique of *lumbung* to art and cultural magazines in 2022, I remembered Documenta's track record of promoting new artistic paradigms that later revealed themselves to be in full accord with capitalism (the 1955 edition included a display of Abstract Expressionist painting covertly sponsored by the CIA).[18] One editor outright told me that "artists are not this stupid." Perhaps. But how does one theorize the project's uneasy marriage of art and capital? Indonesian contemporary art is still too young to have been subsumed by the cultural industry in the manner described by Adorno. The members of ruangrupa could hardly be portrayed as sell-outs for accepting the invitation to curate the world's most prestigious art event. To call Gertrude Flentge Documenta 15's greatest artist was gratifying, but somehow tenuous, given that both she and her employer refused to answer questions about their role in the project.

Galit Eilat, one of the few critics who reflected on the exhibition's complex relationship with its funders and animators, described the exhibition as pioneering a "friendship industry." This idea encapsulates the project's conflicts of interest, but doesn't account for their willing alignment.[19] An industrial settlement would allow ruangrupa to insist that *lumbung* was a radical proposal for the reorganization of social, political, and material relationships between actors in the West and the developing world, with art as the center for innovation. DOEN would claim that its work, which involves numerous small arts organizations from the Global South, is an exercise for learning, and the fact that the foundation holds all the cash is of no consequence.

If "learning from lumbung" (as ruangrupa described their work) addresses the role of the artist and the savant in Saint-Simon's model for technocratic statecraft, the industrialist was quick to catch up. A 2023 video work by the Turkish artist Köken Ergun provided a bizarre counterpoint to *lumbung's* soft power play directed at Indonesia. Ergun's musical skit *China, Beijing, I Love You* lampoons the country's attempts to gain control of Indonesia's natural resources such as lithium and bauxite under the guise of international friendship. The video is a catchy and effective piece of propaganda aimed at protecting Indonesia from China's imperialism (Figure 3).

China, Beijing, I Love You! was presented in Berlin in an exhibition concerning seafaring and imperialism in the Global South, unconnected to Documenta.[20] Its outlook, as well as its funding and commissioning,

18 Mirl Redmann, 'Beyond Nationalism? Blank Spaces at the Documenta 1955', *Artl@s Bulletin* 9, no. 1 (2020): 29–43.

19 Galit Eilat, "Ruangrupa: Contemporary Art or Friendship Industry?*" *TripleAmpersand Journal (&&&)*, 24 March 2024, tripleampersand.org/ruangrupa-contemporary-art-or-friendship-industry.

20 "Indigo Waves and Other Stories: Re-Navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora," Gropius Bau, 2023, www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropius-bau/programm/2023/ausstellungen/indigo-waves/ausstellungstexte.

Figure 3 Köken Ergun, *China, Beijing, I Love You*, 2023 (still from video). Courtesy the artist.

however, bore an uncanny resemblance to the Kassel exhibition's. The ideological link between ruangrupa's pro- Western friendship industry and Ergun's backer's dig at China's less nuanced deployment of the same techniques is difficult to unsee. In both, art and capital exist in a symbiosis that gives artists the leading edge, at each step encouraging technocratic industrialists to reaffirm their positions. Both endorse Western imperialism as vehicles for human progress. Both are wrapped in xenophobia (condemning antisemitism, encouraging Sinophobia) spearheaded by artists. Ergun's piece had European art world insiders nodding along. It failed, however, to inspire even a hint of reflection on the West's industrial interest in Indonesia's rare earths.

What if avant-garde artists are the master planners of capital hegemonies and not merely conformists? Aren't they the cart tugging on the horse of capitalism, and forward? Contemporary art has finally implemented Saint-Simon's 19th-century ideas, proving his belief in their socially benevolent effects to be somewhat naïve. The Frenchman's designs did consider the risk of artists becoming uncritical mouthpieces for the industrial class's excesses. But in his view, the risk wasn't that proximity to power would corrupt artists. Instead, Saint-Simon feared a collective failure to uphold a vision of human progress.

For Saint-Simon, preventing such a collapse was a shared responsibility of the triumvirate. In ascribing it, he understood the industrial class as composed of wage workers and industrialists alike. Their shared lot was the theory's key safeguard because it necessitated the consideration of both the groups' interests—and the interests of artists as internal to that class, too. One of those interests was the cultivation of a certain liberty for innovation, and therefore for critique, as a necessary condition for the triumvirate's work.

A world vision shared by all classes isn't unappealing. Perhaps it is also unattainable.

Figure 4 *Les moines de Ménilmontan ou les capacités Saint-Simoniennes*. The Verville-Martenot press, 1832. Public domain.

In his later life, Saint-Simon played host to a quasi-religious salon-cum-colony of worker intellectuals. His guests were referred to as "monks" in the press because they each contributed to the project practically- as cooks or carpenters- in accordancewith their capabilities. The internal workings of this commune had more than a passing aesthetic resemblance to Documenta 15's failed experiment in the communal living (Figure 4).

The trial aside, Saint-Simon's more serious proposals for artists, and his articulation of their relationship to capitalism, never received a fair test. His ideas were superseded in no small part by a far broader vision of the avant-garde that emerged from the work of Karl Marx. The Communist Manifesto separated workers from the industrialist class and critiqued Saint-Simon triumvirate as authoritarian.[21] Marxism neither privileged artists the way Saint-Simon did, nor did it condemn it alongside capitalists. The artist class, therefore, could earn its position within the revolutionary elite on ostensible merit. It could do this either on material grounds, or by denouncing the capitalists and siding with the workers.

Despite being inextricably linked with the professional-managerial class, if not the bourgeoisie, today's artistic cadres do not

21 David Cottington, *The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction*, 1st ed, Very Short Introductions 342 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 1.

recognize Saint-Simon's description of their social role. Delusionally, they prefer still to identify with Marx's proletariat. Their neglect of Saint-Simonian principles has allowed them to remain blind in the dance between art and capital which they often lead. Understandably, they do not wish to be reminded of their responsibilities. This is why my art school colleagues see themselves as capitalism's conscientious objectors, despite occupying elevated management positions within its institutions.

Are artists, to respond to that editor, "this stupid" after all? This cliffhanger has no answer. Pressed for a practical example of his model triumvirate contributing to human progress, Saint-Simon was forced to look as far as ancient Egypt and Persia. It is unlikely that his vision could today inspire a radical change in the art world, and even less so that it could decisively redirect the course of capital. His description of the artist's role in shaping the world today, however, should inspire some painful introspection. A

Playing the Rules

Anna Sebastian's exhibition *What We May Also Do* at Verdurin

John Cussans

All that is mysterious or make-believe by nature approaches play.

Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (1958)

The Exhibition

Verdurin is a self-styled aesthetics store located in a social housing estate in Hoxton, a traditionally working-class neighborhood in East London famous for being hipster-central in the early noughties. Hosted by the critic and curator Pierre d'Alancaisez, its name is taken from Proust's literary character Mme Verdurin, who in *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu* hosts a fashionable, literary salon in Paris. It's an unlikely place to encounter a serious contemporary painting show these days. In the 1990s, at the height of the contemporary U.K. art scene, there were many artist-run spaces like in East and South London. But as the gentrifying process that such spaces helped to set in motion gathered momentum, the properties that young artists once rented became unaffordable, and the big, commercial galleries moved in, sweeping up the cream of the painting crop.

It's a well-rehearsed story, and much has changed since then. The tripling of the cost of art degrees, the waning of the commercial art market, and cuts in government funding for the arts since the economic crisis of 2008, mean that finding affordable studio or ad-hoc gallery spaces is even harder for those without access to family wealth. Creatives who were able to, turned their hands to more bespoke, entrepreneurial crafts like baking, barista-ing and brewing. For someone who lived through those times, the déjà vu of finding a space like Verdurin was oddly, if uncannily, re-assuring. Bohemia, it seems, is still alive in East London.

In *What We May Also Do*, Verdurin's first painting show, the British artist Anna Sebastian exhibited two large and two medium-sized paintings that shared the space with an eclectic range of carefully curated books and artisan products. The show's title is taken from a local tax bill sent to Anna's colleague Oliver Bennett. It is double-edged, suggesting a power game between the state and those who choose not to comply with its demands. It is also the title of a play by Bennett, responding to the work, that was staged at Verdurin during the exhibition.

The first impression of the paintings evokes modern America in the late 1950s or early 1960s: the ill-fated optimism of those times, the over-saturated, Technicolor palette and the intimations of the spooky, science-fiction end of pop culture. Despite hints of

surrealism and suggestions of post-1970s figurative painters like Eric Fischl, Neo Rauch or Paula Rego, the style is conservative, classical even: conventional perspective, naturalistic figures in verdant landscapes or interiors with picture windows, drama frozen statuesquely.

The works form part of Sebastian's Gloria series, named after the central character in *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy*, an educational film created by the American psychotherapist Everett Shostrom in 1964. In the film, three of the most famous psychotherapists of the day conduct a short session with Gloria Szymanski, a 31-year-old almost-divorced single mother and one of Shostrom's clients. In the sessions, Gloria speaks openly and intelligently about her difficulty being honest with her daughter, her own upbringing and insecurities; and her conflicted moral values about sex. The male therapists have fifteen minutes each to demonstrate their different approaches to psychotherapy on the same patient. Carl Rodgers plays the loving father-figure, Fritz Perls the cruel critic and Albert Ellis the pragmatic intellectual.

The film, still widely used in educational settings, was followed by controversy after it was renamed the Gloria Films and shown, without legal permission, on television and in at least one cinema. Gloria, the consenting patient turned unsuspecting minor film star, became a cause célèbre in psychotherapeutic circles, inspiring widespread discussions—and sometimes wild speculation—about the ethics of recording and making public a private, psychotherapeutic encounter, the unforeseen consequences for the patient, and the overt sex and gender imbalances within the profession. It is a story eloquently and movingly retold by Gloria's daughter Pamela J. Burry in *Living with the Gloria Films* (2008).

The central ideas of psychoanalysis had become commonplace within the arts by the 1950s. Rooted in the ideal of a unique individual communicating their feelings and emotional states through form, color and gesture, Abstract Expressionism, the dominant painting movement of the time, drew on those aspects of classical psychoanalysis that gave substance to the avant-garde sensibility of breaking free from academic and social constraint in order to access the deeper, repressed and authentic truths of personal experience.[1] The art critic Harold Rosenberg wrote that the creation of art in America after World War II was bound up with a tragic "quest for identity," an insight drawn from his understanding of Freudian psychoanalysis and its meaning for literature and painting.[2] It was, he wrote, in the act of "action painting"—a term he coined—that the painter became an actor, transforming the canvas into a theatrical stage upon which their inner-being was made public.[3]

By the time of the Gloria Films, Abstract Expressionism was being challenged on several fronts, not least from the nascent women's art movement that pointed out the machismoof some of its most high-profile

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1 Art Therapy, which developed concurrently with Abstract Expressionism in the U.S., was similarly shaped by psychoanalysis and the theory that spontaneous creative expression can communicate deeper psychological states. For an overview of the influence of psychoanalysis on Abstract Expressionism see Donna L. Roberts, "The Psychology of American Abstract Expressionism," *International Journal of Art and Art History* (June 2023), https://ijaah.thebrpi.org/journals/ijaah/Vol_11_No_1_June_2023/2.pdf

2 See Harold Rosenberg *Act and Actor: Making the Self* (1970). Rosenberg's choice of tragic heroes that set the stage for the modern artist is, unsurprisingly, an all-male cast: Oedipus, Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello and Raskolnikov.

3 Such a quest, we have come to realize, can also be enacted in the public realm of the art world, the personal relationships of its players, in the private realm of psychotherapy, or sometimes in all three, as in the entangled lives of Rosenberg's contemporaries Clement Greenberg, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, where off-stage interpersonal conflicts, worked through in psychotherapy, spilled over into the bar, home and studio. See Alexander Stiile's *The Sullivanians: Sex, Psychotherapy, and the Wild Life of an American Commune* (2023) discusses the role of psychoanalysis in the lives of Greenberg, Krassner and Pollock (https://www.gq.com/story/jackson-pollock-sullivan-institute).

representatives and assumptions made about the universality of its content. The tension was experienced personally by artists like Judy Chicago, for whom operating in the professional artworld meant downplaying recognisably gendered signs, symbols and content.[4] Profound emotional content, it seemed, was more acceptable when expressed abstractly by men than symbolically by women.

Pop, Minimalism and Conceptualism, each in their own way, rejected the personal and expressive values of action painting in favor of the stripped-down, mass produced, cool, iconic and detached, a reaction that led to an enduring polarization between those who see art as a sincere, ineffable and profoundly human activity and those who see it as a game of tactical moves within a wider social system.[5] Since then, the art world has been recognized as a kind of living theater in which the emotional lives of the players, their intellectual differences, passions, liaisons, alliances and schisms, are as much a part of the story of art as what ends up hanging on the gallery wall. It was a trend amplified by the transition in popular media from cinema to television and the development of more versatile recording technologies. In the process the difference between the everyday person and nascent star began to blur.

Three Approaches to Psychotherapy was made after psychoanalysis had been mainstreamed into U.S. popular culture, largely through the medium of cinema. Its title echoes *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), a Hollywood film noir based on a non-fiction book of the same name, in which the central character, who is suffering from multiple personality disorder, is saved by a heroic psychoanalyst who unearths a repressed traumatic memory of her having, as a young child, to kiss her dead grandmother.[6] From this perspective Gloria, immortalized in celluloid, becomes a kind of inadvertent psychotherapeutic celebrity, a Hitchcockian pre-cursor to Warhol's factory stars.

The Works

It is in the space between inner and outer world, which is also the space between people – the transitional space – that intimate relationships and creativity occur.

D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (1951)

The titular work in the show is a large, colored pencil and watercolor work, in which a female figure in a pink dress (Gloria) sits on a modernist couch in what could be a waiting room or office, looking for something in her handbag (a cigarette probably, as Gloria smokes throughout the sessions). On the coffee table before her is a vase of pink roses and a small warrior statue, Athena perhaps, now fallen on her back, looked upon by two tiny figurines. The rear wall of the office seems to be either a large-scale, panoramic landscape painting with red, gestural clouds or a picture window onto the scene. Behind Gloria, to the right, another version of her, in the same pink dress, stands beside a bookcase, her hands clasped in front of her facing a male figure. He is wearing a white shirt, sleeves rolled up, black trousers, tie and glasses, and holds a white object in his left hand. They appear to be in conversation. In the right foreground a spectral figure sits, back towards us, in a modernist chair. Its construction, suggestive of a wheelchair, adds an air of vulnerability to the figure. Given that he has lost the substance of his upper body, this may be Rogers, who, at

4 See Judy Chicago *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

5 The celebrated rivalry between British art critics Matthew Collings and Peter Fuller, who performed their differences on television, is exemplary of this enduring polarization.

6 The real-life Eve on which the original book was based, Christine Costner Sizemore, was diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder (now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder) in the 1950s. During her psychotherapy with Corbet H. Thigpen and Hervey M. Cleckley, she signed the rights of her life story to 20th Century Fox, a contact she later contested.

Figure 1 Anna Sebastian, *What We May Also Do*, 2024. Mixed media on paper mounted on ply, 170 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Verdurin, London

the beginning of *Three Approaches*, explains that his method encourages a "climate of transparency" between therapist and client, to better access the genuine person.[7] A vaporous, serpentine ribbon of translucent paint, emanating from the bookshelf and passing from the transparent figure's head, through the crotch areas of the standing figures, to the seated Gloria's, suggests a mysterious ectoplasmic energy force connecting them all.

On the opposite wall of the gallery are two smaller oil paintings. The first depicts a young girl in a pink dress, bright red cardigan and white sneakers running, face down, towards us along a golden forest path, mottled with purple shadows. The path leads from a geometrical building painted in simple outlines in the middle distance. The girl seems to be looking for a way off the path and into the forest, but she may have just missed her chance. Two sinister figures on the path behind her, possibly in pursuit, seem to have come from a California Modernist building nestled in the forest to the right of the abstract building.

Those familiar with the history of psychotherapy in the U.S. might recognize the building as Esalen Institute in Big Sur,

7 It is Perls, Anna has told me, dissolved by her and Gloria's anger.

Figure 2 Anna Sebastian, *Is this your corner?*, 2024.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Verdurin, London

Figure 3 Anna Sebastian, *Untitled*, 2024.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Verdurin, London

California, the epicenter of humanistic and New Age approaches to therapy that emerged in the 1960s, and with which Gloria's interlocutors were closely associated.[8] Perls, who was particularly harsh to Gloria during their session, lived and taught there for several years. Pammy, Gloria's daughter, who harbored an intense hatred towards Perls for how he treated her mother, also spent time in Esalen, unknowingly living close to where Shostrom had invited Perls to participate in the film. To the left of the girl, a framed sign, modelled on those at Esalen, depicts a horizonless, pale lemon landscape, dotted with rocks, in which aimless blue figures, like the one's following her, wander without connection. A rainbow evoking the translucent ribbon in the first work connects the base of a tree behind the sign to the Institute through a blue sky with the same red, gestural clouds in it.

The second painting depicts the same California landscape and vivid red, brush-stroke clouds in a blue sky. Another sign, standing amongst luscious, deep green cacti and ferns, depicts the blackboard-like image of a girl drawn in chalk, bouncing a ball on a path that leads to a schematic rendering of Esalen, engulfed in an ominous red fog. As a pair, the two images suggest different relations to the psychotherapeutic institution: the path of innocence *into* it and a frantic flight *from* it. The red clouds and red fog literalize the sublimation of repressed rage into the vaporous and gestural manipulation of paint, a counterpoint perhaps to the ethereal, rainbow-like beam that promises a positive connection between different people in different times.

The fourth painting, and the centerpiece of the show, is an interior scene in which two versions of the same female figure float in large transparent spheres. The first, wearing a bright red, short-sleeved, crew-neck dress, hair styled in a late 1950s wavey perm, works on a sky-blue typewriter. It's an image taken directly from the opening sequence of *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy*, in which a secretary types postcard-size notes. Placed on the table beside her, they become the opening titles and credits for the film. In the painting, the postcards are replaced by a single, semi-transparent page in the central foreground, an X-ray perhaps, marked with luminous green and white chalk marks.

Behind the first woman, her double, much paler, the dress now lilac as if faded by time, sits in the same position, but the typewriter is no longer visible. The spheres float in a dark, wooden space, beside a bookshelf and before a picture window, that opens onto a bright, sunlit garden of trees, lawn and a lake. Beyond the lake are two cars, rendered in a few brush strokes, and a white figure, reminiscent of those following the young Gloria down the golden path from Esalen, watching the house. A translucent pink band, evoking the smoke trail and rainbow in the other paintings, spirals from the cars, crosses the garden and enters the room through the window. It passes over a dark wooden table upon which there is an arrangement of bright blue and pink, lavender-like plants in a green bowl and the X-ray image, before joining with the first of the two spheres. More overtly science-fictional and surrealistic than the other images, the bubbles and rainbow beam suggest an extra-terrestrial, trans-dimensional intrusion disrupting the

8 By the early 1960's the term *psychoanalysis* had begun to be superseded by *psychotherapy*, the preferred name for a range of more pragmatic, person-centered and bodily-focussed approaches that moved away from the questionable, problematic and unpopular shibboleths of Freudianism. All the therapists who met with Gloria were trainedr in psychoanalysis. Carl Rogers trained with Alfred Adler, an early supporter of Freud and part of his inner circle until their break in 1910, after which Adler developed his own Society for Individual Psychology (or "psychotherapy"). Rogers was also influenced strongly by Otto Rank, one of Freud's closest colleagues. Fritz Perls, whose early involvement with the bohemian circles of German Expressionism and Dada led him to revolutionary left-wing politics in the 1920s, was trained in Vienna by the radical, anti-fascist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. Albert Ellis was analysed and trained by former Dadaist-turned-Jungian psychoanalyst Richard Hülsenbeck and the Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Karen Horney.

Figure 4 Anna Sebastian, *How should I be? Give me a fantasy*, 2024.
Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Verdurin, London

sense of conventional time. The blue desert flower that the beam passes through is psychoactive perhaps, and the green palimpsest a cryptic, alien message yet to be deciphered.

The Game

Role playing in male societies freezes people into shapes that are not necessarily congruent with their real identities. But it was not the fact that role-playing itself upset us, but rather that the roles were pervaded with positions of dominance and submission.

Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1982)

Few people would question the importance of psychology for our appreciation and understanding of art today.[9] But though their histories are thoroughly interwoven, there is no easy way to map the complexity of their interactions, and few have attempted to do so.[10] Once we get into the details of a particular artist's work, art movement or branch of psychology, making definitive statements about their relationship becomes increasingly tenuous. There are exceptions of course, such as when artists produce work while in psychotherapy (Jackson Pollock), make work in response to a specific psychoanalytic theory (Mary Kelly) or combine art making with a psychoanalytic practice (Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger). There is also a vast body of literature addressing the psychology of art and creativity—both the motivations for, and experiences of it—and innumerable psychological interpretations of individual artists' work. But in the end, given the eclectic and diverse influences that shape it, when it comes to making art, there's always more going on than can be captured by any psychological theory, and attempts to do so often ring hollow.

What then should we make of a British artist in 2024 choosing an unintentional psychotherapeutic film-star from 1960s America as the inspiration for a series of contemporary figurative paintings? Their out-of-time quality, the themes of mothers, daughters, doubles, and the power play between doctors and patients, all suggest a personal understanding of the psychotherapeutic encounter. In it, the past and present can never be entirely uncoupled, one is always shaping the other, and how we relate to each other as adults is inevitably influenced by experiences from childhood. But this is Gloria on the couch, not Anna. Is Gloria a surrogate through which Sebastian can approach personal experiences publicly while simultaneously keeping them at arm's length? Why choose source material that is so out-of-time and context? And what is the relationship between psychotherapy and painting? I met with Sebastian during the exhibition to discuss her choice of Gloria as a subject matter and how she understands the relationship between the two processes.[11]

Sebastian explains the importance of the child psychologist D.W. Winnicott's concept of transitional space is particularly relevant to painting because it operates as a space in-between people: "It suggests that the structure of play is constant and an organic part of interacting with others, the world and the self, a kind of amorphous limitlessness. I feel as though it is the playful nature of interaction

9 I am using the general term 'psychology' here to include psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, mindful that there are important differences between them and that, professionally speaking, they are usually considered both distinct and sometimes antagonistic fields. All however concern the mind, how it works, affects our behavior and how to fix it when it goes wrong.

10 One exception is the contemporary performance artist Peter Tzanev who has mapped the parallel histories of psychology and modern art movements from Symbolism to Speculative Realism. See Peter Tzanev, "Visual Representation of Psychological Concepts and Terms in Modern and Contemporary Art" (2020), https://art-in-psychology.com/2/Peter-Tzanev-Visual-representation-of-Psychological-Concepts

11 We met at the gallery on Monday June 10, 2024.

and the playful possibilities in reality that I have been trying to represent in my images. A question that I feel is acute within the images in general is what are the conditions necessary for play? And how might play respond to and subvert the context of their environment?"[12]

Stages and frames are recurrent motifs in Sebastian's work. Oskar Schlemmer, the German painter and choreographer, described the stage as an "imaginary arena," an area separate from everyday reality, in which time and space can be molded at will. For Sebastian, this vision encapsulates the potential of the picture plane and the staged analytic session to be testing-grounds, experimental laboratories and spaces of play. She is also drawn to the work of Sanford Meisner, the acting teacher who encouraged actors not to focus on themselves, but instead to pay attention to other actors in their environment. From this perspective, the paintings, the gallery, the wider environment of which they are part, the people who interact within and around them, and the ideas they discuss in relation the work and each other, are all elements of a collective theater.

Play for Sebastian, in both its theatrical and ludic sense, means of taking control and asserting power in a situation. Sebastian understands play as a freer activity than games. Games are played, but in them something essential to play's wider sense is lost. Games tend to have formalized structures and rigid rules, often governed from outside the game itself. They are competitive, have clear aims and ends, winners and losers, and require a specific set of skills. In play participation is voluntary, its outcomes uncertain. It is more closely associated with make-believe, mimicry, mystery and illusion. In a playful world, we are all actors performing roles, inventing the script as we go along.

From this perspective, psychotherapy can be seen as a game of two players, the rules of which can be challenged and questioned inside a session. But it also has external rules which are more inviolable: the place and time, regularity and frequency of the sessions, the contracts, agreements, ethical guidelines etc. As with painting, understanding the rules of psychotherapy allows for freedom, invention and insight, even if it requires the rules to be broken. Sebastian says that:

> *The structure of the analytic session forms a plot line, and Gloria and her therapists become characters which the image making process allows me to direct. What is interesting about this is where the play space is perceived by others, because whether it resonates with someone else becomes important to a painting (that isn't made solely for the artist). This isn't necessarily important for the psychoanalytic space but it is important for the filmed session. Indeed, it is Gloria that makes these films so engaging. She is a waitress, a mother, an ordinary woman, but she is also glamorous and intelligent. She asks questions about her sexual freedom during a crucial shift in social perspectives. In her pink dress and her cigarette, she makes quite an iconic image of the pre-1968 woman questioning societal acceptance and openness about her sexuality.*

The scene with Perls is crucial for Sebastian because, though it is evident that both players are acting out roles, their games are very different:

12 Winnicott's concept of transitional space refers to a phase in an infant's development when it begins to distinguish between inner and out reality, that which is 'me' and 'not-me'. The transition is facilitated by a 'transition object (such as a blanket or soft toy) and mediated through the child's relationship with the mother. It has been very influential on art theory, notably in Peter Fuller in in Art and Psychoanalysis where he applied it to the color-field paintings of Robert Natkin and Mark Rothko. See Peter Fuller in in Art and Psychoanalysis (1980) and D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" in Playing and Reality (London: Tavistock Publication, 1971).

If, as Caillois says, "Games are not ruled and make believe. Rather, they are ruled or make believe,"[13] then there could be, in Fritz Perls' session with Gloria, a clash of games, one in which Gloria is make-believing her own vulnerability to gain power over the male analyst, and another in which Fritz Perls enforces the rules of his own game—which Gloria doesn't want to play or feels unable to play – but nonetheless chooses to participate in. She reacts negatively to Perls' game, but her reaction is still encased within its rules. She could choose to leave, but there is a lot of pressure (film crew, set, contracts) which oblige her to stay. I feel as though he breaks the rules of how she expects him to act, the game she is used to playing. She is also unable to exit orgain points in his game. There are certainly moments in her session which are significant, such as Perls calling her a phoney and a little girl. I can identify with her and, in identifying her at this moment, I can stage a reaction or solution—like the disappearance of Perls."

Sebastian is very familiar with the use artists have made of free and spontaneous activity to access deeper layers of the self. She has written on the work of Ithell Colquhoun, the British-American surrealist who, guided by Jungian and occultist ideas, used divinatory methods to access and communicate with extra-dimensional beings and forces that populated the collective unconscious.[14] But although Sebastian describes her painting as an instinctual process, it does not attempt to represent a deeper, truer sense of her being through abstract gesture and form. There is, however, an unconscious element to how the works are made. She says:

In my drawing of Gloria's psychoanalytic office there is a sense of spontaneity. But I am also making deliberate aesthetic choices regarding line, tone, and material, which contradict pure unconscious production. To balance this, I frequently ask myself, 'why not' place this here or use this color to incorporate more intuitive decisions. In this way painting is always working with the unconscious. And through the act of making an image, other images may arise as responses or continuations. In painting, if I start to apply paint or color to a surface, I am driven to continue to compose the image in response. There can be an organic and instinctual process, which the conscious self is present and engaged with.

In the context of asymmetrical power relations, play clearly has a subversive power for Sebastian. But can't it also be a diversion, as Perls seems to perceive in Gloria's playfulness? She replies:

I don't feel that play is necessarily a diversion within my images, but rather an exploratory force for visually investigating a scene. Painting enables a kind of freedom to do as I wish. Though the act of making something is not always enjoyable, the capacity to make whatever you want, however you want (or can), and in line with your own vision is exciting. It's my universe in a painting, and it obeys the rules and logic I wish it to have. It's also daunting to have that kind of freedom and to allow oneself to partake in an activity that takes a lot of time, is often perceived as quite useless in its unclear value by the outside world. Play is important to me because, for all that work, it needs to be enjoyable. It is a subtle, intense, and personal way I can communicate with others or reflect upon experiences. I imagine the work of the artist is to identify a symbolic truth about their lived reality, and the image becomes a mode by which this is revealed to others.

Much has changed in the sixty years between *What We Must Also Do* and *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy*. No doubt there were bohemian circles in East London sixty years before then too, when artists of different stripes saw the world as a theater in which they could question received ideas about their identities and roles, and challenge the forces that kept them in place. There will also have

13 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

14 See Moran, S and Sebastian A 'Mantic Staining' in *The Fenris Wolf*, Issue No. 11 (2022)Trapart Books: Vimmerby, Sweden.

been those who looked back to earlier times when the world seemed simpler, less cluttered, easier to understand, before the seeds of the present confusion were sown.

The out-of-time quality of Sebastian's paintings evoke the perennial returning of the past that helps us make sense of the present. From a contemporary perspective, Gloria's performance presents us with an historical window onto a moment when women in America began to take control of their sexual identity and power on a much larger scale than ever before, a liberation that drew on the lessons of psychoanalysis and avant-garde art. But the controversy the Gloria Films generated also reminds us that, despite the great advances made in terms of gender equality, deep structures of dominance and submissiveness persist within heteronormative sexual relations, especially where the game involves fame, money and status.

Traditionally, theater and painting are artforms through which the world is represented to a public who respond to and take meaning from the work according to their own perspectives, expertise and lived experiences. Though they have general rules governing their production and presentation, the bending, breaking or subversion of these rules is what leads to innovations within them. Similarly, psychotherapy has its rules and its players and is a game that has evolved through the questioning of its rules. But ordinarily, psychotherapy is not a game made for a public. This is what makes the Gloria Films such an alluring phenomenon for Sebastian. Gloria is a surrogate for her, someone she can identify with, a role-model she might like to play sometime. But Gloria's story also has meaning for Sebastian because of how it speaks, obliquely, to her own life.

Sebastian's choice of Gloria raises the issue of how the on- and off-screen life of the patient-artist becomes intertwined with their inner and outer-worlds in unpredictable ways when private truths are made public. The uninvited notoriety Gloria later experienced by consenting to be filmed, the betrayal of trust by the men whose careers were enhanced by doing so, and private accounts of sexual intimacy being made public without the woman's consent, all resonate with contemporary sexual political issues.

Clues to Sebastian's personal stake in Gloria's game might be found in the incidental elements she has added the material from the film: the fallen warrior goddess on the coffee table, stared at by a pair of indifferent onlookers; the motif of vaporous bands, winding paths and ribbons of paint that connect different characters across space and time; figures on horizonless planes wandering zombie-like without connection to others; the duplicating of female characters; mother/daughter figures; the red mist; and the cryptic green X-ray that replaces the credits of the original film. But, as we have learned, psychological readings can only tell us a small part of the story of a work of art. In the end, what counts for Sebastian is that painting is a space for play, rather than a rigid game of winners and losers, dominants and submissives, tops and bottoms. Whether it's on the scene, the stage, the therapist's couch or in the process of making paintings, when the conditions for play are met, the artist can enter the game of power and the symbolic truths that both connect them to, and make them different from others, can be freely shared. A

Reflections from Theodor Adorno's Unbuilt House in Pacific Palisades

Volker M. Welter

On January 30, 1946, Gretel Adorno wrote from Los Angeles to her in-laws in New York that she and husband Theodor "are awaiting the start of our house-building with greatest suspense; it is supposed to happen by 10 February." Mrs. Adorno continued that the still "empty property [...] is especially lovely [...] And the name of the street will also appeal to you: Via de la Paz."[1] Earlier, on December 7th, 1945, Theodor W. Adorno had explained that the decision to build their own house was triggered by the sale of their rented home at 316 South Kenter Avenue in Brentwood. The Adornos arrived at their decision in consultation with Max Horkheimer and Friedrich Pollock, two colleagues from the Institute for Social Research, which "is enabling us to finance" the new home.[2] Later in the month, another letter reported that the "house contract will probably be signed next week."[3] For an architectural historian, the January 1946 letter is especially exciting. It identifies the street on which the new home was to rise and notes when construction was to start, which suggests that a building permit was obtained; two crucial pieces of information with which to begin unraveling the mystery of whether and what kind of house the Adornos may have commissioned, or even built, while in exile in Southern California.

Theodor W. Adorno had lived in exile from April 1934 onward, when he fled Nazi Germany for the United Kingdom. From there, he and Gretel Adorno moved to New York in February 1938 and Los Angeles in November 1941. During the exile, they faced all the difficulties that refugees and émigrés from national socialism had to deal with, including where to live in a foreign country or city, how to make a living, and, especially acute for a philosopher, how to take up again one's profession using a different language. To have escaped the Holocaust caused Adorno "an enduring sense of guilt at the very fact of his survival."[4] What life in exile meant to him can be gathered from Aphorism 18, "Refuge for the Homeless," from *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, which ends with the often-cited words that "wrong life cannot be lived rightly."[5] To live

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to his Parents 1939–1951*, ed. by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz. Translated by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), letter 150, Los Angeles, Jan. 30, 1946, pp. 244–45 (p. 244, 245).

2 Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, letter 145 Los Angeles, Dec. 7, 1945 (p. 240).

3 Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, letter 146 Los Angeles, Dec. 23, 1945 (p. 241).

4 Peter E. Gordon, "Adorno's damaged life: Seventy years after its publication, Theodor Adorno's Minima Moralia is a warning against resurgent fascism," *The New Statesman*, February 1, 2022, www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2022/02/adornos-damaged-life (accessed August 18, 2024).

5 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, transl. by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), pp. 38–39 (p. 39).

rightly does not mean gaining a "'true life' [...] as if there were an authentic substance in contrast to the falsifying social manifestation," as the last sentence often is misread.[6] Nor is it an existentialist "inhabit[ing of] social and space-time worlds as embodied beings,"[7] totally bereft of any links to the exile. Instead, Adorno wrote *Minima Moralia* in Los Angeles between 1944 and 1947; accordingly, behind Aphorism 18 lies "the furnishing of the Adornos' house in California,"[8] to which one must add the attempt to build a private home in exile around the turn of 1945 to 1946.

Aphorism 18 paints a dire picture. "Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible," for "traditional residences [...] have grown intolerable" as all the comfort and shelter they once offered no longer liberate but, nowadays, betray knowledge and succumb to family interests, respectively. Purchasing a period-style house as a refuge means to embalm oneself. New approaches to architecture and interiors, such as the Wiener Werkstätten and the Bauhaus, two major design reform movements among the many that existed before and after World War One, lose their significance when considered from the distance of the exile. And "functional modern habitations," which are severed from history as they are "designed from a tabula rasa, are living-cases manufactured by experts for philistines, or factory sites that have strayed into the consumption sphere." The way out of the dilemma is to live a private domestic life in an uncommitted, suspended way that fulfills societal expectations and meets private needs without attaching "weight to it [the domestic life] as something still socially substantial and individually appropriate."[9]

One may read the aphorism as a retrospective glance at the fierce architectural debates of the Weimar Republic, pitching traditional and period dwellings versus modernist housing estates. The references to once-meaningful traditional homes also recall Adorno's pre-exile Frankfurt homes.[10] The aphorism is undoubtedly a comment on the situation of war-destroyed European cities, for example, when Adorno claims that "labour and concentration camps" anticipated a future in which "the house is past." At the same time, the aphorism traces surprisingly well the contemporary California architectural scene that the Adornos as house-hunters, even potential home builders will have encountered, including the fear of émigrés ending up in "furnished rooms, [...] trailers, cars, camps, or the open air."[11]

In the later 1940s, Los Angeles architecture was still dominated by traditional buildings from upper California's Spanish and Mexican colonial periods, and the popular revival-style edifices that cited, from the late nineteenth century onwards, Spanish, Mexican, and American colonial architecture. Since the 1920s, modernist architecture has increasingly inserted itself into this urban fabric, initially with designs by European immigrant architects like Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra, and American architects like Irving Gill. By the mid-1940s, the modernist Case Study House program aimed at setting standards for domestic architecture that would lastingly modernize California's detached homes, by revolutionizing their construction with industrially produced materials and

6 Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One last Genius*, transl. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), p. 184. The German text credits the misreading of the final sentence to "Generationen von Studenten und Journalisten;" the English edition renders this incorrectly as "generations of German students." (Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno Ein letztes Genie* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2003), pp. 222–23; Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One last Genius*, p. 184.)

7 Matt Waggoner, "How not to be in One's Home: Adorno's Critique of Architectural Reason," *Architecture Philosophy*, vol. 4 No.1 2019: 27–46 (27).

8 Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One last Genius*, p. 285.

9 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 38–39..

10 Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One last Genius*, p. 285.

11 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39.

prefabricated parts. Along with this in the rapidly expanding metropolitan region of Los Angeles were developer-built, architecturally non-descript homes of all sizes and sorts, buildings that architectural history tends to ignore unless the discipline condemns them for their association with growing suburbia. Where does the Adornos' house fall within this contemporary architectural scene of Los Angeles? And where within the range of homes and housing Adorno juxtaposed in Aphorism 18?

Pacific Palisades is on the western edge of the City of Los Angeles, wedged between Malibu further west and the City of Santa Monica to the southeast. To the south, it borders the Pacific Ocean; to the north, it reaches high up into the rugged Santa Monica Mountains. Via de la Paz runs north to south on the neighborhood's eastern side, dividing a slice of land between Temescal Canyon and Potrero Canyon before ending high above the Pacific Coast Highway. Via de la Paz's intersection with Sunset Boulevard marks Palisades Village, the quasi-downtown area of the neighborhood. The early beginnings of modern Pacific Palisades in this area hark back to the movie industry; in the early 1920s, members of the Methodist Church began building it up as a residential neighborhood. From the mid-1930s on, Pacific Palisades was increasingly home to many émigrés and refugees from national socialism; in the mid-1940s, when the Adornos thought about building a new house, the neighborhood around Via de la Paz was on the cusp of full development, even if new houses were then still randomly sprinkled throughout the area (Figure 1).

One of the major attractions of Pacific Palisades and adjacent neighborhoods was the distinct suburban character of the stunning landscape. In a letter from late 1941, when he lived on Kenter Avenue, Adorno wrote enthusiastically about the closeness to the ocean compared to Los Angeles proper, which is thirty miles or so inland. The landscape's physical beauty made him recall the French Riviera, San Remo, and Tuscany. He admired the "more southern style of architecture" and that "the houses, all bungalows and never offensive to look at, are spaced far apart." He concluded that "the entire wider vicinity here is somewhere between city and country," which allowed him to take numerous walks but also made driving a necessity to get to anywhere and anybody, such as Max Horkheimer, who lived a ten-minute drive away.[12] To appreciate the American suburban lifestyle based on individually owned automobiles was not unique to Adorno and his fellow émigrés. Instead, it was already popular with modernist central European architects in the 1920s. Fritz Block, a Hamburg-based architect, edited in 1928 an anthology on modernist housing in which fellow modernist architect Adolf Rading admired the urban form of the loosened-up (*aufgelockerte*) US-American city, an urbanistic consequence of car ownership.

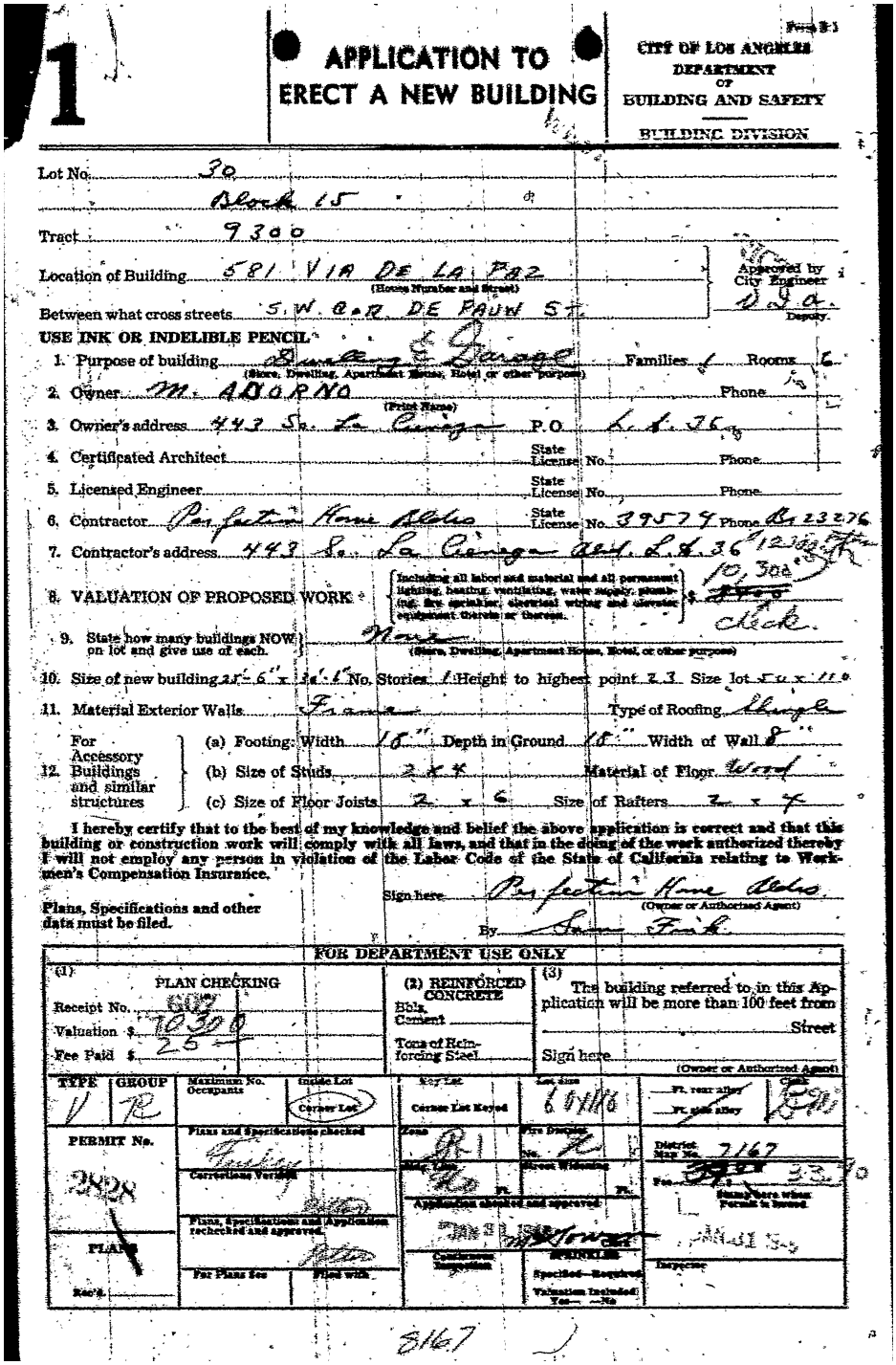
> In America, the car as a means of mass transportation has already made possible a quite different pattern of expansion of cities compared to ours and much lower densities in the outer suburbs that are not dependent on the efficiency of a public transport system.[13]

Block and Rading were forced to emigrate within a decade: Rading and his Jewish wife went to Palestine and later to the United Kingdom, and Block to Los Angeles. Other émigrés in California joined the appreciative suburban chorus, for example, the theatre director Max Reinhardt, who planned a vast music and arts complex for a new Salzburg-

12 Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, letter 44 Los Angeles, 30.11.1941, pp. 69–72 (p. 70).

13 Adolf Rading, "Die Typenbildung and ihre städtebaulichen Folgerungen," in *Probleme des Bauens: Der Wohnbau*, ed. by Fritz Block (Potsdam: Müller & Kiepenheuer, 1928), p. 76 (translation by Iain Boyd Whyte).

Figure 1 Pacific Palisades in 1944. Via de la Paz is the long street in the center of the image. The junction with De Pauw Street where the Adornos wanted to build their home is marked. Image: Flight c-8666, frame 3-40 (detail), January 5, 1944. Courtesy of University of California Santa Barbara Library Geospatial Collection.



APPLICATION TO ERECT A NEW BUILDING

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING AND SAFETY
BUILDING DIVISION

Lot No. 30
Block 15
Tract 9300
Location of Building 581 VIA DE LA PAZ (House Number and Street)
Between what cross streets S.W. COR. DE PAUW ST.
Approved by City Engineer — Deputy.

USE INK OR INDELIBLE PENCIL

1. Purpose of building Dwelling & Garage (Store, Dwelling, Apartment House, Hotel or other purpose) Families 1 Rooms 6
2. Owner M. ADORNO (Print Name) Phone
3. Owner's address 443 S. La Cienega P.O. L.A. 36
4. Certificated Architect State License No. Phone
5. Licensed Engineer State License No. Phone
6. Contractor Perfection Home Adds State License No. 39579 Phone Rx 23276
7. Contractor's address 443 S. La Cienega Blvd. L.A. 36 12/26/45
8. VALUATION OF PROPOSED WORK (Including all labor and material and all permanent lighting, heating, ventilating, water supply, plumbing, fire sprinkler, electrical wiring and elevator equipment therein or thereon.) $ 10,300 Chk.
9. State how many buildings NOW on lot and give use of each. None (Store, Dwelling, Apartment House, Hotel, or other purpose)
10. Size of new building 27'-6" x 24'-1" No. Stories 1 Height to highest point 2.3 Size lot 50 x 110
11. Material Exterior Walls Frame Type of Roofing Shingle
12. For Accessory Buildings and similar structures (a) Footing: Width 16" Depth in Ground 12" Width of Wall 8"
(b) Size of Studs 2 x 4 Material of Floor Wood
(c) Size of Floor Joists 2 x 6 Size of Rafters 2 x 4

I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief the above application is correct and that this building or construction work will comply with all laws, and that in the doing of the work authorized thereby I will not employ any person in violation of the Labor Code of the State of California relating to Workmen's Compensation Insurance.

Plans, Specifications and other data must be filed.

Sign here Perfection Home Adds (Owner or Authorized Agent)
By Frank

FOR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY

(1) PLAN CHECKING
Receipt No. 60
Valuation $ 10300
Fee Paid $ 25.-

(2) REINFORCED CONCRETE
Bbls. Cement
Tons of Reinforcing Steel

(3) The building referred to in this Application will be more than 100 feet from Street
Sign here (Owner or Authorized Agent)

TYPE	GROUP	Maximum No. Occupants	Inside Lot / Corner Lot	Key Lot / Corner Lot Keyed	Lot Area	Ft. rear alley / Ft. side alley	Cash
V	R				6 0/110		25.-

PERMIT No. 2828
Plans and Specifications checked
Corrections Verified
Plans, Specifications and Application rechecked and approved
Fee Plans Fee — Filed with
Zone R1 — Fire District No. 2 — District Map No. 7167
Bldg. Line 20 Ft. — Street Widening Ft.
Application checked and approved
Conference Required — SPRINKLER Specified—Required — Valuation Included Yes— —No
Fee 33.10 — Stamps here when Permit is issued
Inspector

8167

style music festival in Los Angeles because the "rapidly expanding city" and the surrounding towns "promised to grow into the grandest and most beautiful *horizontal* city on Earth."[14]

Searching for a building permit is not the most thrilling task for an architectural historian, and considering the length of Via de la Paz, I braced myself to look for a considerable time through documents for each lot on the street on the Online Building Records database of Los Angeles' Department of Building and Safety. A strategic error on my end extended this time, for when I reached the junction with De Pauw Street, I turned to the eastern sections of the Via de la Paz until I approached the same intersection for the second time. The very last set of records for the ultimate lot in the junction's southwestern corner finally noted as the owner "M.[argarete] Adorno" (Figure 2).

Permit 2828 for 581 Via de la Paz was approved on January 31, 1946, only a day after Gretel Adorno had written to her in-laws about the project.[15] The Adornos had acquired a corner lot of 50 by 110 feet, with one shorter side facing Via de la Paz, and the other abutting the adjacent lot on North Mount Holyoke Avenue over to the west (Figure 3). A neighbor to the south had already built a house in 1939 (destroyed 2025). The Adornos planned a one-story, one-family building of thirty-five feet, six inches by thirty feet, six inches, resulting in a little over a thousand square feet of enclosed space, or six rooms. The shingle roof of the wood frame structure would rise to a maximum of twenty-three feet. The material of the facades remains unspecified; it may have been stucco or wood sidings, comparable to the cladding of the neighbor's home. The new house was valued at $10,300. The permit form reminds applicants that "Plans, Specifications and other data must be filed," though none have survived. After looking through the other permits for this street address, it was quickly apparent that the Adorno house was never built; instead, a different house by another builder for a new owner was permitted in 1951. This house was torn down when the present building was erected in the early 2000s (destroyed 2025). Finally, permit 2828 does not record any architect's name, which is not unusual, as even today, it is possible to build smaller houses in California without a licensed architect. Instead, the permit was signed by Sam Fink of *Perfection Home Builders*, a developer-construction business.

Perfection Home Builders was among many developers and builders who regularly advertised their design-and-build services before and after World War Two. Classified ads placed by the company and the occasional news article in *The Los Angeles Times* about recently completed buildings illustrate the range of homes Perfection Home Builders offered (Figures 4). Usually depicted are one-story houses with hipped roofs and stuccoed exteriors, quite similar to the home shown in Figure 5; some wood siding may create architectural accents, but outstanding or daring architectural designs do not characterize these homes. Even rarer are examples of distinct architectural styles, such as homes reminiscent of Spanish and Mexican colonial architecture. The ads regularly point out the affordability of building with Perfection Home Builders, regardless of whether the company or the clients furnished the building sites and plans. Many ads also invite prospective homeowners to write in for a free brochure. It is tempting to picture Herr

14 Reinhardt quoted in Volker M. Welter, "Salzburg in Los Angeles: Max Reinhardt and Paul László's vision of a *Festpielstadt* in the Hollywood Hills," in *Wie sich Salzburg inszeniert: Vom Werden einer Musiktheaterstadt*, *ed. by Sigrid Brandt and Thomas Wozonig* (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2023), pp. 242–56 (p. 255).

15 City of Los Angeles, Dept of Building Safety, Building Division. "Application to Erect a new Building, Permit 2828, January 31, 1946" (https://ladbsdoc.lacity.org/, "Search by Address," 581 Via de la Paz). Unless noted otherwise, all details about the house in this paragraph come from this permit.

Figure 3 Aerial view of subdivisions at the intersection of Radcliffe Avenue and Haverford Avenue in Pacific Palisades, California, 1940. The site for the Adorno house on the south-western lot at the junction of Via de La Paz and De Pauw Street has been marked. Courtesy of Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives, Pacific Palisades Historical Society Clearwater Collection.

Adorno enjoying his morning coffee while perusing the real estate sections of *The Los Angeles Times*, marking relevant ads with a stubby pencil to alert Frau Adorno about which brochures to write for.

It is not that Adorno did not know what the new house should be. In 1941, he described in great detail to his parents the home at 316 South Kenter Avenue, the first abode of the couple in exile in Los Angeles.

> The house we have rented is one half of a semi-detached house, two-storey. [...] On the ground floor we have our double garage [...]. On the upper ground floor[,] a very large, bright living room, a small dining room, a kitchen with side rooms. [...] On the first floor: Gretel's bedroom, my bedroom, my study (wood) and the bathroom with shower.

He emphasized that "everything [was] furnished in the most modern and practical fashion, and with genuinely useful *gadgets*."[16] Architecturally, the house exemplifies a Colonial Revival style with brick chimneys

16 Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, letter 44 Los Angeles, Nov. 30, 1941, pp. 69–72 (p. 71, words in italics in English in German original).

Figure 4 A typical display of Perfection Home Builders illustrating the modest types of homes they build and advertising the free brochure. *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1940, Part 2, p. 9.

Figure 5 Private home, possible developer designed, Pacific Palisades, 1940. Courtesy of Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives, Pacific Palisades Historical Society Clearwater Collection.

Figure 6 *Adorno House*, South Kenter Avenue, Los Angeles, built 1939. Street façade as seen in 2025. The Adornos occupied the left half of the duplex building. Photo: Content Production.

Figure 7 Richard Neutra, *Freedman House*, Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, 1949. Photograph: Julius Shulman © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10)

rising at either narrow end, and porches stretching across the Kenter Avenue façade on the two levels above the garages. The lower half of the house was stuccoed, and the upper half was covered with horizontal wood siding, all painted in a light color (Figure 6).

In 1945, the Kenter Avenue house became the model for the Via de la Paz home, which Adorno envisions as "a little house, divided roughly the same as now, 2-storey: downstairs a little forecourt, garage, kitchen, savic [service] *porch*, living room, upstairs 2 bedrooms, den (study) and sunporch." He added, "We will have a splendid view of the mountains and the ocean from there,"[17] meaning the new home provided an additional feature that the Kenter Avenue home did not offer to the same degree.[18]

Compared to such specific ideas about rooms, their adjacencies, and placements within the two-story home, Adorno had little to say about the overall architectural appearance of the new house. However, some details about the kind of home he might have had in mind can be found in Aphorism 19, "Do not knock," from *Minima Moralia*. Like its immediate predecessor, this aphorism comments on the contemporary California architectural scene, especially on the increasingly popular modernist architecture. An exemplar of modernist domestic design, Richard Neutra, the Austrian architect of

17 Adorno, Letters to his Parents, letter 145 Los Angeles, Dec. 12, 1945, p. 240 (Words in italics in English in German original. The meaning of "savic porch" is unclear, see endnote 1 on p. 240. Most likely it means service porch usually adjacent to a kitchen.).

18 Adorno's letter and Permit 2828 note different numbers of floor levels. The permit also notes different lot sizes: 50 ft x 110 ft and 60 ft x 110 ft.

Jewish background who had immigrated for economic and professional reasons to the U.S. in the early 1920s, would soon build on Via de la Paz. Located three blocks south of Adorno's site, the Freedman house (1948–9, destroyed 2025) occupied the southernmost lot of its block, coincidentally also a corner lot. Neutra's design aimed to merge indoors and outdoors, visually through floor-to-ceiling plate glass walls and practically with the help of sliding glass panels that extend the internal flow of space to the outside and vice versa (Figure 7).

Architects tend to celebrate the functional and spatial changes brought about by modern technology as improvements. For Adorno, they were nothing but the imposition of precision on human life, which subjected humans to the rule of objects and expelled "hesitation, deliberation, civility" from human gestures and movements. Adorno illustrates the consequences of this imposition by drawing on such details as sliding glass doors, which were becoming increasingly popular in contemporary Californian domestic architecture. Modern technology makes humans lose "the ability [...] to close a door quietly and discreetly, yet firmly." Slamming doors is terrible enough; even worse is that modern doors "have the tendency to snap shut by themselves," which imposes "on those entering the bad manners of not looking behind them, not shielding the interior of the house which receives them." Adorno continues:

> "What does it mean for the subject that there are no more casement windows to open, but only sliding frames to shove, no gentle latches but turnable handles, no forecourt, no doorsteps before the street, no wall around the garden?"[19]

Windows and doors that swing open, door handles that push down rather than knobs that turn, front yards, auto courts, and flights of steps leading from a sidewalk to the private property through an opening in a garden wall; these are some of the architectural elements and details that Adorno seemed to cherish, whether as elements of dwelling in general, or for his own house.

The rented place on Kenter Avenue was initially attractive because of the ample space it provided the newly arrived émigrés.[20] Irrespective of the building's colonial architectural appearance, the modesty of the design is comparable to houses usually built by Perfection Home Builders. Indeed, almost any design by the Adornos' contractor for the Via de la Paz home would have blended into the neighborhood, as a street view from the early 1940s illustrates (Figure 8). Adorno will also have been familiar with new homes commissioned by fellow émigrés in the suburban areas in and around Los Angeles. Among these was most notably Max and Rose "Maidon" Horkheimer's house (1941, demolished 1995) on D'Este Drive in Pacific Palisades, a one-story building with seven rooms arranged in an H-shaped floorplan (Figure 9). The low bungalow was clad in horizontal wood siding and protected by a hipped roof covered with shingles. The construction company Structon and the structural engineer Gerald Marsac built the edifice. Architectural historians describe the latter as not "a figure of generally recognized greatness in his field, or a craftsman of consummate skill."[21] A little earlier, in 1938, the Jewish-German émigré journalist and writer Rolf Nürnberg from Berlin had a local California builder-"architect" construct a new home in Pacific Palisades. Adorno knew Nürnberg; both men had participated in a seminar on the theory of needs organized by

19 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 40.

20 Adorno, *Letters to his Parents* 1939–1951, letter 44 Los Angeles, Nov. 30, 1941, pp. 69–72 (p. 71).

21 Historic Resources Group, *Bellwood Apartments*, May 2019, Appendix IS-2: Historical Resources Assessment Report, p. 43 (https://planning.lacity.gov/eir/nops/SrResidentalComm_TheBellwood/Appendix%20IS-2.pdf, accessed 30 August 2024).

Figure 8 Looking up Via de La Paz, north of Sunset Blvd. in Pacific Palisades, California, 1945
Courtesy of Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives, Pacific Palisades Historical Society Clearwater Collection

Figure 9 Structon with Gerald Marsac, *Max and Rose "Maidon" Horkheimer House*, D'Este Drive, Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, 1941 (demolished 1995). Garden façade with an additional room added in 1945 (on the right) and partial enclosure of the porch in 1954 (middle ground left).
Photograph: © Rolf Wiggershaus, 1980

Figure 10 Liane Zimbler, Ernst Toch House, Santa Monica, 1941, street façade. Photograph: Julius Shulman © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10)

Pollock and the Institute of Social Research in Los Angeles in the summer of 1942.[22] In nearby Santa Monica, the émigré composer Ernst Toch commissioned in 1941 a house designed by the Austrian-Jewish émigré architect Liane Zimbler (Figure 10).

The Nürnberg and Toch houses are two stories tall with plain stuccoed facades and low-hipped, shingled roofs, and bereft of any architecturally distinguishing features. Man more buildings of precisely such inconspicuousness built for émigré clients or designed by émigré architects could be named and located; they all share an architectural appearance that barely registered within their streets and neighborhoods and has indeed not registered at all with architectural history. They were often fine, very well-laid-out homes, but their architectural blandness was a deliberate choice. It signaled professionalism in cases of émigré architects designing these houses, which often were their first projects in exile, and respectability for the émigrés commissioning them.

The inconspicuousness of these houses defies any simplistic, even stereotyping, expectations that émigrés would have opted for modernist architecture, or even for fellow émigré modernist architects as the designers of their homes in exile. Instead, like many other homes on the suburban fringes of Los Angeles, these émigré houses evoke traditional images of domestic architecture. To this end, they relied on stylistic details, without regressing to the always-popular revival styles, while simultaneously avoiding progressing to architectural modernism. This characteristic may have attracted Adorno because the physically and architecturally inconspicuous appearance of a house erected by Perfection

22 Gretel Adorno, "Records of a Discussion of the Theory of Needs 30 June 1942", transl. by David Fernbach, *New Left Review*, 128, March-April 2021,pp. 71–78 (p. 73).

The discipline has barely taken notice of the multitude and variety of houses that émigré architects designed, and émigré clients commissioned, all over metropolitan Los Angeles and beyond.

Home Builders, for example, would have precluded considering such a home as "socially substantial and individually appropriate." Instead, it allowed "one not to be at home in one's home," perhaps the only form of dwelling that made life in exile somewhat bearable.[23]

Philosophers and historians of architecture sometimes claim that "more immediate connections to architecture" of Adorno have yet to be uncovered.[24] Yet in the case of his new home in exile, the philosopher directly engaged with architecture, for example, when he envisioned the new home by imagining how to dwell in it, drawing on his experience of the rented abode and his observations of life in California houses in general. Significantly, Adorno did not adopt a train of thought similar to the "design process in which an architect is occupied with architecture as such,"[25] meaning, for example, specific architectural-aesthetic concerns that often also guide architectural history. It is not surprising, then, that the discipline has not only overlooked Adorno's attempt to build a new home in exile—which was easy to miss as the house was never constructed—but has yet to realize that modest, developer-built suburban houses were accepted and even favored by many of those émigrés who designed, commissioned, or acquired new homes in exile.

Coda

This article is part of a larger research project into the domestic architecture that central-European, German-speaking émigré architects and émigré clients created in California from the late 1930s onward. It was researched, written, and submitted for publication well before the destructive wildfires that swept through Pacific Palisades, Altadena, and elsewhere in Los Angeles County and nearby in January 2025. The Pacific Palisades fire spared none of the twenty-one blocks of Via de la Paz; the preliminary Palisades Fire Damage Maps[26] records currently just six houses on the street as remaining without damage and five with minor damage. All homes are destroyed at the corner of Via de la Paz with De Pauw Street, including the one that occupied the lot once owned by the Adornos.

An unbuilt house fire cannot take, but other houses commissioned by émigré and immigrant clients or designed by émigré architects were not spared. The Meier house in Pacific Palisades, just up the road from the

23 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39.

24 Waggoner, "How not to be in One's Home," p. 27.

25 Hilde Heynen, "Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling: Reflections on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*," *Assemblage*, April 1992, No. 17, 78–91 (p. 85).

26 County of Los Angeles, *Palisades Fire Damage Map* (Esri Community Maps Contributors, County of Los Angeles, California State Parks, © OpenStreetMap, Microsoft, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA, USFWS), https://recovery.lacounty.gov/palisades-fire/, accessed January 18, 2025. See also County of Los Angeles, *Eaton Fire Damage Map* (City of Pasadena, CA, County of Los Angeles, California State Parks, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS), https://recovery.lacounty.gov/eaton-fire/, accessed January 18, 2025.

Adorno lot, is gone. Its client was a German-speaking immigrant coppersmith whose career took him into airplane manufacturing. Its designer was the émigré architect Rolf Sklarek, the sole architect practicing in California with a rare Bauhaus diploma in architecture until Herbert Bayer's retirement to Santa Barbara in the 1970s. Further inland, the Eaton Fire destroyed the modest home that the Austrian émigré architect Fredric Frankel had designed for his family in Altadena. Frankel had come to Los Angeles from London, to where he had escaped from German concentration camps in 1939.

Sklarek and Frankel designed homes in Pacific Palisades, Altadena, and elsewhere on the edges of Los Angeles when those neighborhoods were not yet enclaves of multi- million-dollar houses. Indeed, they and such German-speaking émigré architect colleagues as, in alphabetical order, Herbert Cordier, Leopold Fischer, Ulrich Plaut, Frederick Reichl, William Wolf, and Liane Zimbler—to name only a few—usually created modest houses that émigré clients such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Nürnberg, and of course other clients, could afford in exile.

California architectural history has ignored this kind of émigré architecture in favor of a narrow, even stereotyping assumption that if and when central-European, German-speaking architects arrived in California, they were on a mission of bringing architectural modernism to the state. Accordingly, the discipline has barely taken notice of the multitude and variety of houses that émigré architects designed and émigré clients commissioned all over metropolitan Los Angeles and beyond. The current fires may reinforce such an a historical viewpoint, as it may never be known how many to date unidentified works by émigrés architects, and commissions by emigre clients, may be lost to their owners, occupants, and the history of architecture. A

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A Political Artist

David Carrier

Sean Scully: Broadway Shuffle
Seven sculptures located along Broadway between Lincoln Square and Washington Heights, New York
July 2024 to March 2025

Imagine someone who, knowing that in the late twentieth century New York was the center of the international art world, comes to look for art in Manhattan's public spaces. There are some good older works: Gaetano Russo's *Columbus Monument* (1891) at Columbus Circle; the lions (1911) by Edward Clark Potter, on the steps of the Public Library; and *Alma Mater* (1903) by Daniel Chester French at Columbia University, are well situated. I admire *Atlas* (1936-37) by Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan, and *Prometheus* by Paul Manship (1934), at Rockefeller Center. Including also works in lobbies visible from the street, two paintings, Frank Stella's *Salto nel Mio Sacco* (1984) at 599 Lexington Avenue and Roy Lichtenstein's *Mural with Blue Brushstroke* (1984-86), at 787 Seventh Avenue, are successful. On the other hand, Tony Smith's *Tau* (1965), at Hunter College, Lexington at 68th street, shows what can go wrong when a good artwork is badly installed. Little convincing contemporary public art is found in this visually busy environment. We lack an iconography apart, of course, from advertising imagery.

Sean Scully always deals with basics. That is his great strength—it's why his art speaks to so many people in diverse cultures, in America and Europe, but also in China and Korea. His classic 1980s stripe paintings mimic the rhythms omnipresent in the modern city and in blues music, abstractly presenting these basic structures. And then in the 1990s, he painted abstracted walls of light. More recently, he has done figurative images showing his son and wife playing at the seashore. And for some years, he has also been making sculptures. The early *Crann Saoilse* (*Wall of Light*) (2003), which is in Ireland, is a thirty-meter-long wall of black and white stone cubes, set in a checkered board pattern, a three-dimensional version of the walls of light. And now he's making stacking sculptures, "stacks of blocks that are made of objects," as he says. "They're an accumulation of objects." *Broadway Shuffle*, the first exhibition in the United States to focus exclusively on his sculpture, consists of seven of these works, which are were displayed along Broadway, on the west side of Manhattan from July 2024 to March 2025:

Installation view of *Sean Scully's Broadway Shuffle*, a public art commission presented by the Broadway Mall Association. On view July 2024 – March 2025. Photography by Tom Barratt.

Depicted: *48* (2024) at Broadway and 64th Street (Dante Park).
Aluminum and automotive paint, 20 ft x 74 in. x 74 in.

Shot Through (2019) at Broadway and 157th Street (Ilka Tanya Payán Park).
Corten steel, 12 x 6 x 6 ft. Photo: Hreedoy Khandakar.

Shadow Stack (2019) at Broadway and 167th Street (Mitchel Square).
Corten steel, 14.7 x 8.2 x 8.5 ft.; Photo: Hreedoy Khandakar.

Installation view of *Sean Scully's Broadway Shuffle*, a public art commission presented by the Broadway Mall Association. On view July 2024 – March 2025. Photography by Tom Barratt.

Depicted: *Stack Blues* (*In honor of Arthur Danto*) (2018), at Broadway and 117th Street. Aluminum and automotive paint, 9 x 4 x 4 ft.

The seven works are *48* (at 64th St.), *Sleeper Stack 2* (at 72nd St.), *Silver Brown Tower* (at 79th St.), *Composite Grey Silver* (at 103rd St.), *Stack Blues (In honor of Arthur Danto)* (at 117th St.), *Shot Through* (at 157th St.), and *Shadow Stack* (at 167th St.)

These sculptures are varied. *Sleeper Stack 2* is made from heavy, rough wooden elements set near the entrance to the subway. *Stack Blues* is more refined looking, metal painted blue. And *Shot Through*, perhaps a tribute to the rough street life uptown, has a large hole cut all the way through. What could be simpler than placing one object on top of another? (Think of Samuel Beckett's accounts of obsessive manipulation.) But just as using urban rhythms or light on walls allows him to construct very varied paintings, so the bare activity of stacking yields very diverse sculptures.

Scully's title is simple: "I called my project 'Shuffle' after a dance, in the same way that Mondrian, another geometric immigrant, called his painting 'Boogie Woogie.'" It's instructive to make your way up Broadway, seeing how these Scullys are different as the neighborhoods change. At Lincoln Center, is the Metropolitan Opera House, and upscale restaurants catering to operagoers. Then when you get to 116th Street, you walk past Columbia University. Finally, all the way uptown, most of the signs are in Spanish, in a poorer neighborhood.

When he was a young, desperately poor Irish immigrant in London, Scully did manual labor. "I was loading huge vans with flattened cardboard boxes: transforming an empty negative space into a crowded negative space . . . The idea of stacking is obsessively interesting to me." Few artists, he notes, have his early experience of harsh physical labor. Unlike some public sculptures, Scully's stacks don't call a lot of attention to themselves. Like the brutal work required to maintain our cities, they are present but not always noticed. Banal industrial products, omnipresent in our cities, are transformed into refined works of art. By drawing attention to the aesthetics of stacking, Scully gives real recognition to the dignity of physical labor. He thus is a political artist. 𝓐

Notes

On public art in Manhattan, see Jean Parker Phifer and Francis Dzikowski, *Public Art. New York* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000). The quotations are drawn from *Abstract Painting, Art History and Politics. Sean Scully and David Carrier in Conversation* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2021).

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

Exploitation Past and Present

Jonathan Hartmann

Jennie Lightweis-Goff, *Captive City: Meditations on Slavery in the Urban South*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 207 pp, $44.95 cloth.

While the writings of Olaudah Equiano, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin demonstrate the central role played by African Americans in these United States, efforts to show the importance of women and urban slaves to America's story are still underappreciated. To this end historian Jennie Lightweis-Goff swaps out the familiar image of a Black farm laborer for the stories of female city-dwellers toiling as hotel staff, sex workers, and domestics.

Captive City, Lightweis-Goff's latest work, reflects on three key questions:

> First, how did the South become rural, or imagined as rural by national culture?
>
> Second, how did the city become sanctuary, or imagined as sanctuary, for people at the margins?
>
> Third, how did African Americans become urban, or imagined as urban, in foreshortened histories that omit the nineteenth century?

Lightweis-Goff focuses her study on what she terms the southern coastal hospitality cities of Baltimore, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans, asking readers to examine the way they view race and social class. Lightweis-Goff centers her work on the early and mid-nineteenth century, whereby she explains the varieties of labor that powered the growth and industry of U.S. cities, much of it nonconsensual and secured by theft, intimidation, and official neglect.

Captive City's account of these cities builds on Walter Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit* ("now-time.") For Benjamin, the traditional way of thinking through history (e.g., the presence of factor X and factor Y will always yield result Z) shrinks life's possibilities to what lies directly in view.

However, for change—a discovery, a peace treaty, a declaration of war—to happen, our present-day life must be spattered ("shot through") with elements of the past that color everything they touch. For Lightweis-Goff, a tourist's encounter with New Orleans street performers dancing for Mardi Gras beads opens a wormhole to the compulsory entertainment provided by nineteenth-century slaves.

Juxtaposing events from the colonial U.S., the early nation, and today, Lightweis-Goff argues that the coastal hospitality cities of the south should be considered as their own U.S. region. In comparison to more masculine inland cities like Nashville and tech-bro Austin, the hospitality cities register as feminine for their watery geographies and their reliance on hotels and tourism. To the eyes of many, the region's preponderance of Black and Brown service labor helps paint these cities as especially other. For example, Eric Gay's September 1, 2005 photograph of Milvirtha Hendricks sheltering in the Superdome from Hurricane Katrina, wrapped in an American flag presented storm-tossed New Orleans as an elderly African-American woman; in 1850, the city's representative woman would have been considerably younger. Lightweis-Goff writes:

> Cities of the deep south, especially New Orleans, developed an industry built on (1) the arrangement of plaçage, or morganatic marriage; (2) the spectacle of the so-called quadroon balls, where white men and women of color socialized; and (3) the "fancy trade" on the auction blocks, in which captive women were sold in highly sexualized spectacles for prices comparable to those paid for strong, healthy workers in cotton and rice economies.

Sold in infancy, Louisa served a Mr. Bachelor as nurse and domestic at the behest of her second owner David Cook. When Cook sold his slaves, a 13-year-old Picquet was separated from her mother and made to serve as concubine to John Williams. Upon Williams' death in 1847, Picquet and her two children were freed, and she eventually made it to Cincinnati, Ohio. Ten years later, when Louisa discovered her mother was living as a slave of Colonel Albert Horton, she wrote to them and, with the help of the Rev. Hiram Mattison, a New York abolitionist minister, succeeded in freeing her mother. Mattison interviewed Louisa extensively; in 1861 he published her story in book form, portraying her as a sexual victim in demonstrating the immorality of slavery.

The notion of cities as havens for marginalized people, specifically African Americans, is troubled by the experiences of Dolly and Louisa, who lived under constant surveillance in the hands of slaveowners and their allies. At a time when political representatives are too overwhelmed to focus on the crimes and misdemeanors performed by a president and his nominees for high office, *Captive City* makes crucial connections between antebellum slavery and service-sector employment today, linking exploitation then and now and convincing readers that more than ever, our "past" record on human and women's rights is present. A

Presidents and Tycoons

Daniel Ross Goodman

Tevi Troy, *The Power and the Money: The Epic Clashes Between Commanders in Chief and Titans of Industry.* Regnery, 333 pp., $33 cloth.

In August of 2024, Elon Musk held a conversation with President Donald Trump on X. Almost more remarkable than the fact that it received 73 million views at the time—and almost as remarkable as the fact that by the following day the conversation had logged over one billion combined views and impressions—was the specter it presented to the country of a once (and possibly future) president talking so amiably and lengthily with one of the world's most impactful businessmen. Commercial titans and political leaders have not always gotten along this well. In fact, as presidential historian Tevi Troy recounts in his terrific new book *The Power and the Money,* relations between presidents and tycoons have often been downright frosty. But whether their interactions have been warm or cold, CEO-commander-in-chief relationships have been one of the most important—and yet surprisingly under-examined—areas of American political and commercial life.

Troy's new volume fills this gap, and then some. *The Power and the Money* is an absorbing, compulsively readable study of how the CEO-commander-in-chief relationship has evolved, from the robber-baron Gilded Age era of John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan to the media titan era of Rupert Murdoch and Oprah Winfrey, and from the Computer Age of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs up through our current Digital and Space Age corporate titans like Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk. In crisp, clearly written prose sprinkled with revealing quotations and pleasing portions of humor, Troy tells the complete history of this indispensable relationship in all its varying facets and iterations, omitting nothing: the good (FDR and the Warner brothers; Bill Clinton and movie mogul Lew Wasserman; Barack Obama and investor Warren Buffett), the bad (FDR and media mogul Henry Luce; Obama and banker Jamie Dimon; Bill Gates and Donald Trump), and the ugly (Richard Nixon and publisher Katherine Graham). Troy here is an amiable and eminently knowledgeable presidential history tour guide, showing us all the major sights—providing us with the essential biographies

of all the major players and informing us how they interacted with one another—while also interspersing these stories with plenty of attention-grabbing facts. Did you know, for instance, that Theodore Roosevelt coined the term "muckrakers"? (And that he borrowed the phrase from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*?) That one of Warren Buffett's earliest hobbies was memorizing baseball statistics? That when he was growing up Bill Gates read the entire encyclopedia? Or that Oprah's original name was "Orpah"?

While these and many of the interesting facts that the book abounds in may be interesting bits of trivia, *The Power and the Money* demonstrates that the president-CEO relationship is anything but trivial. In fact, it is arguably the most significant cross-sector relationship that has existed in American life in the past 125 years. Over the past century and a quarter, no political figures have been more consequential than presidents of the United States, and no business leaders have been more significant in shaping how and what we buy, watch, and read than CEOs of major global corporations. The dynamics of the commander-in-chief-titans-of-industry relationship has greater effects upon how we actually live than any other relationship imaginable. What is surprising, then, is that a relationship that has become so indispensable to American political and commercial life was not always seen as all-important. One of the many benefits of *The Power and the Money* is that it allows us to see how this relationship developed from the early days of Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan, when it was not seen as absolutely vital, to our time, in which a CEO on the level of Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg not having at least some kind of regular contact with the president would be unthinkable. (A testament to how crucial the business-government connection has become is the fact, as the book relates, that CEOs now have their corporations spend an estimated $3 billion a year on D.C. lobbying alone.)

In addition to the large commercial and geopolitical factors that determine CEO-president interactions, *The Power and the Money* is also insightful on the smaller (but in many ways no less important) personal and psychological elements that dictate whether presidents and CEOs get along. Among these aperçus is the reason presidents and CEOs have been more and more drawn to each other as the decades have worn on, and as both government and business have expanded to proportions that would have been unthinkable at the dawn of the republic: "Being president is a lonely job, and everyone seems to want something from you, especially in Washington. No one in the entire government is your peer, which makes business leaders who can be similarly lonely at the top of their own industries, among the rare people who can relate to presidential loneliness and offer personal thoughts about other personalities and power players." The aphorism "it's lonely at the top" never rang more true.

One of the many fascinating elements of the history of the president-CEO relationship is that it continues to unfold, week-by-week, and—in our current news-cycle-on-hyperdrive times—almost

CEOs now have their corporations spend an estimated $3 billion a year on D.C. lobbying alone.

minute-by-minute. The relationship between Elon Musk and Donald Trump is one case in point. Once firmly in the "bad" side of the ledger of this history—and at times even descending into the "ugly" column—the relationship has now moved squarely over to the "good" side of the ledger, for a variety of important reasons which Troy delves into (including Musk's growing realization that the Democrats like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton whom he once backed have become the party more susceptible to wanting to limit free speech). But it is one thing for CEOs and presidential candidates to be on good terms with one another when less is at stake; it is another thing altogether for them to continue to interact amicably with one another when the candidate enters office and assumes the actual power to steer or not to steer favorable policies (and potentially billions of dollars) the CEO's way. It thus remains to be seen how well Musk and Trump will continue to get along since the 45th President's victory last November, now that he has to interact with the Tesla and SpaceX CEO as the 47th President of the United States instead of as a private citizen. If history—and especially the history that Troy relates in *The Power and the Money*—is any indication, tensions could develop between Musk and Trump that did not exist while Trump was out of office. But, then again, both Trump and Musk have already proven that they are not exactly figures that fall into line with historical patterns. Perhaps their penchant to make history, rather than be made by it, will once again prevail—and thereby necessitate a new chapter in Troy's superb narrative. A

Lincoln & Jefferson, Too
The Contradictory Braid

Allen C. Guelzo

Abraham Lincoln was not a historian. But he never stopped seeing himself as part of a history, stretching back to American Revolution, and particularly to the band of revolutionaries whom he liked to call the *fathers* or the *founders*, or the *framers*, and even the *patriarchs* of the American republican democracy. In February of 1860, in his east-coast debut as a potential candidate for the Republican Party's presidential nomination at the Cooper Institute, he identified these figures with the "thirty-nine" men who signed their names to the Federal Constitution.[1] That included, pre-eminently George Washington. But that category had special room for James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, since there are at least seven moments in the *Federalist Papers* (in Federalist nos. 1, 22, 29, 43, 49 and 50) to which Lincoln may be alluding in his writings and remarks. And in some senses, he saw himself as bridging a gap between the political and economic crises of his time and the entire revolutionary generation. "Theirs was the task (and nobly they performed it) to possess …this goodly land," Lincoln said in his first major public address in 1838, "and to uprear upon its hills and its valleys, a political edifice of liberty and equal rights." The task of his generation was "to transmit these…unprofaned by the foot of an invader" and "undecayed by the lapse of time…to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know." Like so much of the Enlightenment's historical theory, Lincoln shared the general fear that even the highest achievements of statecraft were prey to declension and decay, and only by an effort to "recur to first principles" could Americans hope to maintain the original shape of the American experiment. If Lincoln could explain himself in only one sentence, it would be his determination to "turn this government back into the channel in which the framers of the Constitution originally placed it."[2]

To none of the founders (or *framers*, or *fathers*) did Lincoln acknowledge as great and as explicit a debt as he did to Thomas Jefferson. He might praise George Washington as "the mightiest name of earth—long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty; still mightiest in moral reformation." But it was Jefferson he singled out in 1859 (in a letter to Henry Pierce and the organizers of a Jefferson "festival" in Boston) as the author of "the definitions and axioms of free society."

1 Lucas E. Morel, *Lincoln and the American Founding* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2020), 21; Lincoln, "Address at Cooper Institute, New York City" (February 27, 1860), in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. R.P. Basler et al (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 3:522.

2 Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago, Illinois" (July 10, 1858), in *CW*, 2:501; Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 88.

All honor to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there, that to-day, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression.[3]

Lincoln does not leave us a track of footnotes which will tell us how much of Jefferson's writings he read, or what editions and from what editors and publishers. But it is not hard to find literary bits of Jefferson surfacing at unusual points in Lincoln's surviving speeches, papers and letters. In 1791, Jefferson warned that Alexander Hamilton's proposals for a national bank would spell doom to the Constitution, since "to take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specially drawn around the powers of Congress is to take possession of a boundless field of power." Seventy-two years later, it is difficult not to believe that this was what was echoing in Lincoln's mind when he rebuked his over-eager Treasury Secretary, Salmon Portland Chase, for proposals about emancipation: "Would I not thus give up all footing upon constitution or law? Would I not thus be in the boundless field of absolutism?" And in the 1860 Cooper Institute speech, Lincoln called explicitly upon Jefferson's hope that "it is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation…in such slow degrees, as that the evil will wear off insensibly…."[4]

It was, however, the Declaration of Independence which Lincoln revered as the storehouse of those "definitions and axioms of free society," and he did not hesitate to say on the eve of his inauguration in 1861 that he had "never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence." From the moment he had emerged on the national stage as a fierce critic of legalized slavery, he made Jefferson's Declaration the touchstone of his authority for opposition to the extension of slavery and, indeed, of slavery itself. In his great Peoria speech on October 16, 1854, Lincoln contrasted the "despotism" of slavery with "our Declaration of Independence," where self-government and consent are exhibited as "the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism." The partisans of slavery were those who wanted "cancel and tear to pieces" the Declaration. In 1856, he declared that the "practical equality of all men" in the Declaration was "the 'central idea' in our political public opinion." Lincoln attacked the Supreme Court's notorious Dred Scott decision in 1857 for having disregarded "that notable instrument" and its announcement that "all men" were "created equal—equal in 'certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'" No wonder Lincoln could laud Jefferson as the man "who was, is, and will perhaps continue to be, the most distinguished politician in our history." No wonder, either, that when Lincoln chose at Gettysburg to identify the single proposition

3 Lincoln, "Temperance Address" (February 22, 1842) and "To Henry L. Pierce and Others" (April 6, 1859), in *CW*, 1:279, 3:374-6; Morel, *Lincoln and the American Founding*, 107; Richard Brookhiser, *Founders' Son: A Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 140-1. On the Jefferson's birthday "festival," see "Jefferson's Birthday," *Boston Evening Transcript* (April 2, 1859); its participants included many of luminaries of Northern Republicanism, including George Boutwell, John Andrew, Carl Schurz and Henry Wilson. Lincoln's letter explained to Pierce that his schedule prevented his attending, but his letter was noted in the *Boston Evening Transcript*'s coverage of the festival on April 14th. The letter was printed in the *Burlington Free Press* (April 15, 1859), the *Chicago Tribune* (April 18, 1859), the *Wisconsin State Journal* (April 18, 1859), the *Lancaster Examiner* (April 20, 1859), and in Lincoln's hometown newspaper, the *Illinois State Journal*, on April 20, 1859 ("Jefferson's Birthday—Letter from Mr. Lincoln").

4 Jefferson, "Opinion Against the Constitutionality of a National Bank" (February 15, 1791), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. H.A. Washington (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), 7:556; Lincoln, "Address at Cooper Institute" (February 27, 1861) and "To Salmon P. Chase" (September 2, 1863), in CW, 3:541, 6:429; Henry S. Randall, *The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858), 1:227.

over which the Civil War was being waged, he did not hesitate to identify it as Jefferson's: *that all men are created equal*.[5]

The great Lincoln student, Harry Jaffa, once remarked that "Abraham Lincoln looked to Jefferson more than to anyone else for his understanding of the American Revolution"—although it has to be said that this is true for the points on which we are most likely today to fault Jefferson as it is for those on which we still praise him.[6] Jefferson's ultimate solution for the problem of slavery, if there was to be one at all, was the deportation of the black slaves who would be emancipated. "I have seen no proposition so expedient... as that of emancipation of those born after a given day, and of their education and expatriation at a proper age." He was convinced—at least publicly, though not in private—that "amalgamation with the other color produces a degradation to which, no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character, can innocently consent." Besides, the "deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites" together with "ten thousand recollections, by the black, of the injuries they have sustained" made deportation the only way to head off "the extermination of the one or the other race." [7]

For much of his career, Lincoln did not disagree. In 1854, he admitted that his "first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, to their own native land" (although he immediately added that he had doubts "that whatever of high hope...there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible"). Colonization remained for Lincoln a "wise project" for dealing with the end of slavery, as much in his mind for the freedmen as for white society. "Your race are suffering, in my judgment, the greatest wrong inflicted on any people," Lincoln told a delegation of black leaders in 1862, "but on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours.... It is better for us both, there-fore, to be separated." Some of Lincoln's colonization talk was sugar-coating to his larger project for emancipation and abolition, but he did not entirely turn his back on the "hideous and barbarous humbug" (as John Hay called it) until the failure of a colonization experiment at Île-à-Vache, off the southern coast of Haiti, in 1864.[8]

Along with that, Jefferson anticipated the clearing and settling of the now-slaveless land of the West with white immigrants, and the replacement by them of the native tribes that populated the north American continent. Jefferson liked to speak of, and to, native leaders as brothers and children, and in some contexts he would even concede that they were "in body and mind equal to the white man." Still, the state constitution he helped write in 1776 asserted the sovereignty of Virginia over what he called (in the Declaration) "merciless Indian Savages," and he was

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5 Lincoln, "Speech at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), Speech at a Republican Banquet, Chicago, Illinois" (December 10, 1856), "Speech at Springfield, Illinois" (June 26, 1857), "Speech in Independence Hall" (February 22, 1861), in *CW*, 2:266, 385, 406, 4:240; Lincoln, in Henry Clay Whitney, *Life on the Circuit With Lincoln* (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1892), 216; Douglas L. Wilson, "Lincoln's Declaration," in *Lincoln before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 166-70, 178; Richard N. Current, "The Lincoln Presidents," in *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln: The Man and His Meaning for Our Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 138; Michael Lind, *What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America's Greatest President* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 103; Brookhiser, *Founders' Son*, 165..

6 Harry V. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 6-7.

7 Jefferson, in Randall, *Life of Thomas Jefferson*, 3:644; Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), 229.

8 Lincoln, "Speech at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), "Speech at Edwardsville, Illinois" (September 11, 1858), "Annual Message to Congress" (December 3, 1861) and "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes" (August 14, 1862), in CW 3:15, 93, 5:48, 371-2; Hay, diary entry for July 1, 1864, in *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, eds. M. Burlingame & J.R.T. Ettlinger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 217, Current, *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln*, 22.

confident that they would gradually be pressed further and further west, and further and further out-of-sight, and as president in 1809, he did not mind warning tribal leaders that any "unprovoked war" they waged against the United States" would be the cause for his government to "extirpate" them "from the face of the earth, or drive to such a distance as that they shall never be able to strike us."[9]

Lincoln does not offer much of a contrast. The most oft-told tale in the extended Lincoln family was of the murder of Lincoln's grandfather by a presumably-Shawnee warrior while clearing land in Kentucky in the mid-1780s. Later, he participated as an Illinois militia captain and scout in the Black Hawk War of 1832, although without seeing combat. Until his presidency, his contacts and thinking on native policy were tangential at best. But once elected president, Lincoln could not avoid dealing with these issues, and he did so in ways that did not differ substantively from Jefferson's line of thinking. When a delegation of tribal chiefs visited Lincoln in 1861, he addressed them in a childish pidgin—"Where live now? When go back Iowa?"—and when another delegation of "nine chiefs of different nations" in the federal territories "asked the President to counsel his white children, who were annually encroaching more and more upon their tribes, to abstain from acts of violence and wrong towards them," Lincoln merely replied that he would "endeavor to have satisfactory treaties made with them." At the same time, he added, "there is no way in which your race is to become as numerous and prosperous as the white race except by living as they do, by the cultivation of the earth." When a Sioux uprising erupted in Minnesota in 1862, federal troops suppressed it ruthlessly, and though Lincoln claimed that "if we get through this war, and I live, this Indian system shall be reformed," he still signed the death warrants for thirty-eight of the 307 Sioux who had been tried and condemned to death by a military tribunal.[10]

Yet there is another strand in the relationship of Lincoln and Jefferson, this time one of the most serious disapproval and disavowal, and it shows very plainly at a moment long past Lincoln's death in 1865. Lincoln's long-time law partner, William Henry Herndon, aspired to write a magisterial biography of Lincoln, and in 1866 he embarked on an ambitious campaign of interviews and letter-queries to gather information on Lincoln's early life, before he and Herndon met. It is not clear what stimulated him to write to one Theodore F. Dwight in December, 1866, but it is likely it was something which had stuck in Herndon's memory about Lincoln and Jefferson. Was not Theodore Dwight, Herndon asked, the "son of the Theo Dwight that wrote a severe criticism of Jefferson?" Herndon wanted to know because Herndon had read the book when it was advertised for sale in Lincoln's (and Herndon's) hometown of Springfield, Illinois, in 1840, then handed it to

9 Jefferson to the Marquis de Chastellux (June 7, 1785), in *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. T.J. Randolph (Charlottesville, VA: F. Carr, 1829), 1:230; Jefferson, "To the Chiefs of the Wyandots, Ottawas, Chippewas, Powtewatamies and Shawanese" (January 10, 1809), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. H.A. Washington (Washington: Taylor & Maury, 1854), 8:234; Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 24-5.

10 John Hay, diary entry for April 30, 1861, in *Inside Lincoln's White House*, ed. Burlingame, 14; "The President and the Wild Indians," *Washington Evening Star* (March 27, 1863); "Grand Council of Indians," *Washington National Republican (March 27, 1863)*; *Charles H. Coleman, "Lincoln's Lincoln Grandmother," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 52 (Spring 1959), 79; Herndon's Lincoln, eds. D.L. Wilson & R.O. Davis*, 20; *Burrus Carnahan, "Lincoln and the 1862 Minnesota Sioux Trials," Lincoln Lore 1934 (Summer 2022), 8-9; Christopher W. Anderson, "Native Americans and the Origin of Abraham Lincoln's Views on Race," Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 37 (Winter 2016)*, 11-29; *Lind, What Lincoln Believed*, 73, 84-7, 88, 296; *Duane Schultz, Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862 (New York: St. Martin's Press*, 1992), 253, 259, 275, *Andrew F. Lang, A Contest of Civilizations: Exposing the Crisis of American Exceptionalism in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press*, 2021), 227, *and Burlingame, Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2:483.

Lincoln, who "read it." "It had a powerful impression on his mind." The impression was, in fact, all bad. "Mr. Lincoln never liked Jefferson's moral character after that reading," Herndon added.[11]

Jefferson and Lincoln represented a radical dualism in their visions of America, a dualism which remains still at the heart of American politics.

Theodore Frelinghuysen Dwight was not, as it turned out, the son of the Theodore Dwight who had written *The Character of Thomas Jefferson, as Exhibited in His Own Writing* in 1839. *That* Theodore Dwight was the Massachusetts arch-Federalist and grandson of Jonathan Edwards who roasted Jefferson as a deceitful politician with no "regard for the constitution if his interests or his policy were in danger of being injured," and who was a "secret and malignant enemy" of George Washington. However, it was not Dwight's political *exposé* of Jefferson which drove Lincoln over the line as much as it was Lincoln's reading of other stories about Jefferson which had been in circulation even before Dwight's book, that Jefferson had enjoyed a sexual liaison with one of his slaves, that he "dreamt of freedom in a slave's embrace," that he "brought his own children to the hammer, and made money of his debaucheries," and that "a daughter of this vaunted champion of democracy was sold some years ago at a public auction in New Orleans." These were the charges associated with Jefferson's long relationship with Sally Hemmings, and the appearance of it was repulsive enough to Lincoln for it to become the subject of a speech sometime in 1844 or 1845. When the *Chicago Times* exhumed this report in 1860, in an attempt to damage Lincoln's standing with Democratic voters, Lincoln was quick to deny that he had ever "used any such language in any speech *at any time*." But Herndon suspected otherwise. "Mr. Lincoln hated Thomas Jefferson as a man," he confided to Ward Hill Lamon in 1870, not to mention "as a politician."[12]

Whatever else Lincoln was, he was a perfect Victorian bourgeois, morally scrupulous to the last degree, and with no tolerance for sexual canoodling. Herndon remembered that "Mr Lincoln had a strong if not a terrible passion for women," yet "his idea was that a woman had the same right to play with her tail that a man had and no more nor less and that he had no moral or other right to violate the sacred marriage vow." Nor was this the only point on which Lincoln drew broad lines between himself and Jefferson. Jefferson had a wine cellar, and insisted that "if I should fail in the means of getting" a particular pale sherry, "it will be a privation which I shall feel sensibly once a day"; Lincoln was practically a teetotaler who shunned alcohol "because I hate the stuff… It is unpleasant to me and always makes me feel flabby and undone." Lincoln was born into hard-scrabble rural poverty; Jefferson was the offspring of the landed Piedmont gentry. Lincoln had less than a year of formal schooling; Jefferson enjoyed classical schooling from the age of five, plus two years at the

11 Herndon to Theodore F. Dwight (December 30, 1866), in *Herndon on Lincoln: Letters*, eds. D.L. Wilson & R.O. Davis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 65.

12 Dwight, *The Character of Thomas Jefferson, as Exhibited in His Own Writings* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1839), 113, 125; "A Bold Forgery," *Illinois State Journal* (September 6, 1860); Herndon to Lamon (March 3, 1870), in *Herndon on Lincoln: Letters*, 94; Lind, *What Lincoln Believed*, 103. See Lincoln's response to Anson Chester (September 5, 1860) and to James H. Reed (October 1, 1860), CW, 4:111, 124, and the reprint of the charge in the anti-Lincoln *Freeport Weekly Bulletin* (September 6, 1860), the Rock Island Argus (September 10, 1860), the *Ottawa Free Trader* (September 22, 1860), and the *Jonesboro Gazette* (September 22, 1860).

College of William and Mary. Both were voracious readers, and paid attention to at least one classical writer in common, which was Euclid. Lincoln had "studied and nearly mastered the "Six books of Euclid" by 1850, and Jefferson confessed to a passion for "Tacitus and Thuycidides, for Newton and Euclid." (And perhaps it was no accident that when Lincoln spoke of Jefferson's formulating the "definitions and axioms of free society," he was using the language of Euclidean geometry, since "definitions" and "axioms" are what stand at the head of editions of Euclid in the textbooks of the 1840s, *definitions* being descriptions of objects and *axioms* being irrefutable givens concerning those definitions). But Lincoln was not the kind of passionate library rat that Jefferson was, and though he read more widely than he was given credit for by later biographers, Herndon thought that Lincoln "read less and thought more than any man in his sphere in America."[13]

But the gap between the upwardly-mobile bourgeois striver and the elegant patrician ran deeper than cultural divergence, for at the most profound level of political ideology, Jefferson and Lincoln represented a radical dualism in their visions of America, a dualism which remains still at the heart of American politics. In the most obvious sense, Jefferson spoke of an equality which sat blandly alongside the ownership of slaves; Lincoln, by contrast, could not imagine anything less that the complete and unavoidable destruction of the one by the other. "I am naturally anti-slavery," Lincoln claimed in 1864. "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel." Jefferson also parted ways with Lincoln in terms of the direction of history: Lincoln, like Giambattista Vico, was a preservationist who feared that the American republic would not be immune to the cyclical turns of decay; Jefferson, like Edward Gibbon, had greater confidence in the continuous upward movement of ideas and society, and believed that "I shall not die without the hope that light and liberty are on a steady advance" and that "improvement in the moral and intellectual condition of Man" was irresistible. "The flames kindled on the 4th of July 1776 have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished." Both Lincoln and Jefferson were only dimly religious, but Lincoln was far more inclined to employ religious language and applaud religious sentiments than Jefferson. And again: Jefferson conceived of the federal union as a "compact," and in the set of resolutions he wrote for the Kentucky legislature to protest the Adams administration in 1798, he ventured far enough beyond the logic of a "compact" to suggest that any "abuse of the delegated powers" in the Constitution by the federal government could be met with "a nullification of the act" as the "rightful remedy" and "to nullify of their own authority all assumptions of powers by others within their limits." This, Lincoln regarded with little better than horror. "To drive out the visible authority of the Federal Union" was, in Lincoln's estimate, tantamount to forcing "it to immediate dissolution." No government, and certainly not the Constitution of the United States, ever

13 Herndon to James H. Wilson (September 23, 1889) and Jesse W. Weik (February 5, 1887 & January 23, 1890), in *Herndon on Lincoln: Letters*, 229, 307, 310; Jefferson to Joseph Yznardi (May 10, 1803), in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Barbara Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 40:356; 7, 9; Lincoln, "Autobiography Written for John L. Scripps" (June 1860), in *CW*, 4:62; Jefferson to John Adams (January 21, 1812) in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. L.J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 291; John Playfair, *Elements of Geometry: Containing the First Six Books of Euclid* (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1804), 1, 5, and D. McCurdy, *Euclid's Elements* (New York: Collins, Brother, 1846), Herndon, in Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Picture* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1866), 331; Wilson, "The Frigate and the Frugal Chariot," in *Lincoln Before Washington*, 4-14; Drew R. McCoy, An 'Old-Fashioned' Nationalism: Lincoln, Jefferson, and the Classical Tradition" and Glenn LaFantasie, "Lincoln, Euclid, and the Satisfaction of Success," *JALA* 23 (Winter 2002), 61, and 41 (Winter 2020), 25-26.

sanctions its own destruction. "It is safe to assert that no government proper, ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination." But standing idly by while factions, states and regions decide what parts of the federal laws they will obey would do exactly that, and thus "practically put an end to free government upon the earth." The spirit of Jeffersonian nullification "recognizes no fidelity to the Constitution, no obligation to maintain the Union; and…is…treason in effect."[14]

But the most crucial divide between Lincoln and Jefferson arrived when they considered the very purpose of the American republic. "On the side of the Union," Lincoln said, in the message he sent to the special session of the new Thirty-Seventh Congress at the outbreak of the Civil War, "is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men— to lift artificial weights from all shoulders— to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all— to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life." But describing life as a "race" on "paths of laudable pursuit" implied an economic diversity and dynamism in American life from which Thomas Jefferson shrank. The independence Jefferson (and the Continental Congress) declared in 1776 was political, but it had more than a few heavy economic overtones. The British imperial overlords had sought to make Americans economically dependent on the imperial system, whether through the wool they spun or the tea they drank. In Jefferson's mind, American independence meant freedom from dependency on the British imperial system; indeed, the genuinely free citizen was one who owed no dependence on anyone, because "dependence" produces "subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."[15]

The perfect models of independence, in Jefferson's mind, were self-sufficient farmers, who grew what they ate, tended what clothed them, and hewed the wood they used for building and heating. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue," Jefferson wrote in 1785. "Cultivators of the earth are the most virtuous and independent citizens." By contrast, those who labored in cities and in manufacturing were dealing in illusory forms of wealth—bills of exchange, cash, credit—and subordinating themselves to moneyed masters whose rule would be as onerous as that of the British. "While we have land to labor then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff." When "several merchants from Richmond (Scotch, English &c)" showed up in Philadelphia in 1791, he sneered at them for their hope "to dabble in federal filth."[16] But the downside of this agrarian paradise was that it was also entirely static: no one moved up or down, because there was nothing to power them up or down. And that had the added advantage of guaranteeing that an important component of the agrarian workforce in America—namely, African slaves—were never seen as deserving an opportunity to better their lives, and guaranteeing as well that the only way for newcomers and new generations to acquire

14 Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address—Final Text" (March 4, 1861), "Message to Congress in Special Session" (July 4, 1861) and "To Albert G. Hodges" (April 4, 1864), in *CW*, 4:263, 425-6, 428, 7:281; Jefferson, "Kentucky Resolutions of 1798" (October 4, 1798) and to John Adams (September 12, 1821), in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 17:489-91 and 30:547; Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 239; Brookhiser, *Founders' Son*, 144; Lind, What Lincoln Believed, 21.

15 Lincoln, "Message to Congress in Special Session" (July 4, 1861), in *CW* 4:438; Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 274-5.

16 Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 274-5, 290; Jefferson to James Madison (July 24, 1791), in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. R.A. Rutland & T.A. Mason (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983) 14:56.

agrarian independence was an inevitable push westwards, into confrontation with the tribes and the New World's remaining colonial powers.

What Jefferson blessed as agrarian stability struck others as stagnation, and the cure for stagnation would be an economic mobility that used the dynamism of markets, manufacturing and commerce as the ladders for self-improvement. This was what animated the politics of Jefferson's deadly rival, Alexander Hamilton, a propertyless immigrant from the West Indies who saw in trade precisely the opportunities for enrichment and self-transformation that Jefferson dreaded as threats to the stability of agrarian independence. "A prosperous commerce is now perceived and acknowledged...to be the most useful, as well as the most productive, source of national wealth," Hamilton insisted, and he devoted his service as Secretary of the Treasury in the Washington administration to promoting a national bank (to stimulate investment and development), manufacturing, and tariffs (to protect that manufacturing from British competition).[17] A generation later, the debate over policy and economics was still raging, only now championed by Andrew Jackson on the Jeffersonian side and Henry Clay on the Hamiltonian one. And Henry Clay had no more admiring disciple than Abraham Lincoln.

Precisely because Lincoln had been born with no silver spoon in his mouth or land title in his hand, he thirsted for the opportunity to move beyond the boundaries of his father's rude cabin and what he later described as "the back side of this world." The young Lincoln left his father's farm as soon as he was legally entitled to, and never looked back; he opened a store, which failed, and then a second store, which also failed, and then became a lawyer, a profession which (in the illuminating phrase of Charles Sellers) was the advance guard of commerce. His autobiography became a standing rebuke to an immobile Jeffersonian agrarianism: "Twenty-five years ago, I was a hired laborer. The hired laborer of yesterday, labors on his own account to-day; and will hire others to labor for him to-morrow. Advancement—improvement in condition—is the order of things in a society of equals." It was this, also, which fueled Lincoln's hostility to slavery; for what else was slavery but the final word in stagnation, of hopelessness? "I want every man to have the chance" for self-improvement, Lincoln said on his speaking tour of New England in 1860,

> *and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him! That is the true system.*[18]

Lincoln (like Hamilton and Clay) dreamt of a world in which Americans would embark on a constant project of economic empowerment. And that project would take the form, in Lincoln's hands, of what Henry Clay called his "American System": national banks, to create a uniform system of currency; infrastructure (or "internal improvements") to bring markets to consumers and make even farmers participants in vast networks of exchange; and high protective tariffs. As much as we think of Lincoln's presidency in terms of winning the Civil War, we should also think of it terms of a domestic agenda whose target was the entire Jeffersonian economy as much as it was slavery. And it was this which drove Lincoln's administration, even through the years of civil war, to create a national banking system, a

17 Hamilton, No. 12 "The Utility of the Union in Respect to Revenue," in *The Federalist*, eds. G.W. Carey & J. McClellan (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund), 2001), 55.

18 Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47; James Cornelius, "Rev. Noyes W. Miner, 1881-82," *JALA* 44 (Spring 2024), 51; Lincoln, "Fragment on Free Labor" (September 17, 1859) and "Speech at New Haven, Connecticut" (March 6, 1860), in *CW*, 3:462, 4:24-5.

transcontinental railroad, and the highest protective tariff rates in American history.

There is no simple mirror in which we can expect Lincoln to look and see Thomas Jefferson. Lincoln and Jefferson are separated by significant gulfs of style, both in action and in words. Lincoln was "always a Whig in politics," and behind that, a Hamiltonian who never subscribed to a compact theory of the Union, and who had no investment in the "magical omnipotence of states' rights." On the other hand, Lincoln will make an appeal to 'the better angels of our nature" not unlike Jefferson's appeal that "we are all republicans, we are all federalists," and he will not balk any more than Jefferson did at exercising broad executive power.[19] They continue to hover over our historical consciousness, sometimes overlapping, but sometimes also pointing to two very different ideas of America and democracy.

Yet, as his praise of Jefferson's "axioms" reminds us, there is clearly an appropriation of Jefferson, and not entirely as a cynical political maneuver. Not only for Lincoln but for Lincoln's generation, Thomas Jefferson remained a commanding and authoritative figure. Jefferson marched alongside Washington through the schoolbooks of Lincoln's generation; Jefferson's name was attached to cities, towns and counties in over twenty states; and Lincoln had learned, from his earliest school lessons, how

> *Nash, Rutledge, Jefferson, in council great*
> *And Jay and Laurens op'd the rolls of fate.*[20]

Whoever controlled the appeal to Jefferson wielded a significant political weapon for commanding assent, and no one liked making that appeal more than Lincoln's great rival in the 1850s, Stephen A. Douglas, the most influential figure among Jefferson's heirs in the Democratic party. In 1858, when Lincoln challenged Douglas for the senior Illinois senatorial seat, he was conscious that his fellow Republicans were a minority party in Illinois. To win, he would have to pull white Illinois Democrats who were uncomfortable with the prospect of slavery extending itself into the American West (where many of them were hoping to find new homes and new starts) to the Republican column, and it seemed clear to Lincoln that one way to do that was to wrest Jefferson out of Douglas's hands, and to make it clear that Jefferson's sympathies would have lain with Lincoln and the Republicans rather than with the sorry mess that Jefferson's heirs had made of his party and legacy.[21]

In the contest with Douglas, Illinois Republicans flocked gleefully to the banner of Jefferson. "Let it be observed," whooped the Illinois State Republican Committee, "that while Thomas Jefferson and the fathers of the Republic proposed to prohibit slavery in the Territories only, and while the Republican party of today propose no more and no less, Stephen A. Douglas sought, in 1845, to prohibit it in the States, even though the people wanted it!" Lincoln joined vigorously in the whooping. When Douglas tried to attack Lincoln on the standing of the Dred Scott decision, Lincoln replied that "Mr. Jefferson and General Jackson were both against him on the binding political authority of Supreme Court decisions." And in the campaign, Jefferson's doubts about the

19 Anastaplo, *Abraham Lincoln: A Constitutional Biography*, 337; Lind, What Lincoln Believed, 23, 30, 162; Jaffa, New Birth of Freedom, 61; Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 61; Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Abraham Lincoln as War President," in Lucas Morel, ed., *Lincoln and Liberty: Wisdom for the Ages* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 241.

20 Mark Monmonier, *Mapping It Out: Expository Cartography for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 84; Joel Barlow, "Description of the First American Congress; from the Vision of Columbus," in Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces* (New York: E. Duyckinck, 1816), 133.

21 Lincoln made this connection as early as his campaign speeches for John Charles Fremont in 1856, when he claimed that "the Republicans are walking in the 'old paths'... of Washington, Jefferson and others." Lincoln, "Speech at Vandalia, Illinois" (September 23, 1856), in CW, 2:378; David S. Reynolds, *Abe: Abraham Lincoln In His Times* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 177.

justice of slavery became a heavy stick with which Lincoln beat Douglas. "I will remind Judge Douglas and this audience, that while Mr. Jefferson was the owner of slaves…'he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just;' and I will offer the highest premium in my power to Judge Douglas if he will show that he, in all his life, ever uttered a sentiment at all akin to that of Jefferson." How did Douglas reconcile the Declaration of Independence, and its proclamation of equality, with human slavery? "Are Jeffersonian Democrats willing to have the gem taken from the magna charta of human liberty in this shameful way?" Lincoln asked. "Will they maintain that its declaration of equality of natural rights among all nations is correct?" Did Douglas have a better plan for containing the spread of slavery than Jefferson? "I believe if we could arrest the spread, and place it where Washington, and Jefferson, and Madison placed it, it would be in the course of ultimate extinction."[22]

The authority of Thomas Jefferson was, admittedly, a peculiar cloak in which Lincoln wrapped himself, but, as he explained in 1859, it was a peculiarity he had observed in several other odd cases that reminded him of the state of the country. "I remember," he told Henry Pierce in the "axioms" letter,

> *once being much amused at seeing two partially intoxicated men engage in a fight with their great coats on, which fight, after a long, and rather harmless contest, ended in each having fought himself out of his own coat, and into that of the other. If the two leading parties of this day are really identical with the two in the days of Jefferson and Adams, they have performed about the same feat as the two drunken men.*

But Lincoln also borrowed the mantle of Jefferson because the words of the Declaration of Independence really were, for Lincoln and for the America he envisioned, "our ancient faith."

And not ours alone; Lincoln infused a broader meaning into Jefferson's own words than even Jefferson might have encouraged. "Perhaps half our people," Lincoln said at the opening of the debates with Douglas in 1858, have come from someplace else in the world, and have no descent from, or connection with, the revolutionary generation.

> *But when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,' and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, and so they are.*[23]

Lincoln saw in Jefferson's Declaration a universalism that Jefferson himself seems, at best, to have only dimly glimpsed. As much, then, as Lincoln and Jefferson diverged on every other point of real political importance, on the fundamental principle of that universal equality they really did speak with one voice, and to our times as much as to their own. A

22 *Political Record of Stephen A. Douglas on the Slavery Question* (Illinois Republican State Central Committee, 1860), 1; Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, 111; Lincoln, "Fragment: Notes for Speeches" (August 21, 1858), "First Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois" (August 21, 1858), "Speech at Carlinville, Illinois" (August 31, 1858) "Fifth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas, at Galesburg, Illinois" (October 7, 1858), in CW, 2:551, 3:18, 79, 220; Current, "The Lincoln Presidents," 129; Anastaplo, "The Lincoln-Douglas Debates," in *Abraham Lincoln: A Constitutional Biography*, 173.

23 Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago, Illinois" (July 10, 1858) and "To Henry L. Pierce and Others" (April 6, 1859), in CW, 2:499-500, 3:375; Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, 321, and *New Birth of Freedom*, 20, 21.

The "Settler Colonial" Trap for Israel

Tony Fels

Adam Kirsch, *On Settler Colonialism: Ideology, Violence, and Justice.* W.W. Norton, 160pp., $25 cloth

Adam Kirsch's new book, a powerful critique of the concept of settler colonialism as applied to the history of Israel, could not have arrived at a more timely moment. Kirsch outlines a number of essential points that collectively show the shallowness of viewing the establishment of the state of Israel through the lens of this concept, one that has become ubiquitous on college campuses. Moreover, he demonstrates how the concept has been adopted by pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli activists not for its value as a term of scholarly analysis, but rather as a component of a political ideology aimed at undermining Israel's legitimacy. At a length of a mere 140 small-sized pages, the book's brevity and lucidity make it readily assignable for undergraduate and graduate courses (and even for high school social studies classes), thus addressing exactly the audience of idealistic, yet naïve and hot-headed students (and teachers) who today are most in need of reading it. Along with these achievements, however, Kirsch's book exhibits two shortcomings that point in the direction of further work needed to complete the task the author has so forcefully begun.

The term "settler colonialism" emerged in the 1960s and '70s among academics interested in studying the phenomenon of African and Asian decolonization, a process that unfolded with great rapidity following the end of World War II. Scholars used the term to distinguish between colonies like India and Vietnam, where the European mother country sent few of its own people to settle there, and those like Rhodesia or Algeria, where European settlers came to comprise significant minorities of the population. However, by the 1980s and '90s the concept had become a pejorative label—really, little more than a slogan—with which to stigmatize the nation of Israel, itself formed during the same era.

As Kirsch points out, almost none of the characteristics common to settler colonies fits the history of modern Israel's creation. There was no "mother country" which "sent" its Jewish inhabitants to the Ottoman Empire's Syrian and Sidonian (later, Beirut) provinces or its Jerusalem district (together including the area referred to intermittently as Palestine) when the Zionist movement began in the 1870s and '80s.[1] Jews fled the Russian Empire and other countries of Eastern and later Western Europe as refugees from the persecution of pogroms and then the Holocaust. They came on their own steam, in any way they could muster, though helped by the philanthropy of well-to-do Jews in Europe and the United States. They bought land from Turkish and Arab landowners. These newcomers to the place that had given birth to both Judaism and Christianity, moreover, could make their own justifiable claim to being its indigenous people, a term frequently employed by today's settler-colonial ideologues in an attempt to draw a sharp distinction between those said to be the original inhabitants of an area and its later colonial invaders. Not only had the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and then the kingdom of Judea, persisted from early in the first millennium BCE until the Romans killed or enslaved and carried off the great majority of the region's Jews (perhaps about one million in number) in the first and second centuries CE, but Jewish people trickled back and continued to live in Jerusalem, Safed, Hebron, and other Palestinian towns and villages, sometimes in substantial numbers, during the many centuries following the conquest of the area by Arabs and Islam in the seventh century. [2]

Even when the British endorsed the Zionist project by proclaiming their support for a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, this important decision did not mean that the British would now call all the shots there. The growing Jewish population in Palestine faced off with the British on numerous occasions during the period of the British Mandate (1920-1948) over the issue of how many Jewish immigrants would be allowed in. Indeed, the British ultimately turned their back on the Jews in 1939. Were it not for the moral pull, particularly on President Truman and the Americans, exerted by the Holocaust and especially by the plight of more than 100,000 displaced European Jews who had survived the Second World War, the modern nation of Israel might never have come into existence. [3]

Since Kirsch's book centers on how the notion of settler colonialism serves a broader ideology, some of the book's strongest parts go toward identifying that ideology, which turns out to be a species of revolutionary leftism that adopts a particularly uncompromising, almost nihilistic stance. The clue to understanding this outlook resides in the fact that once a country has been labeled a settler colonial society, there are no remedies to ameliorate this oppressive situation short of complete decolonization. Yet, significantly, the ideology began by taking aim at nations like the United States, Canada, and Australia, countries in which the earlier inhabitants had been reduced in number—typically, these

1 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 218n37, 28, 34, 221n69.

2 Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, 2nd edit., revised and updated (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 18-20.

3 Sachar, pp. 287-295.

theorists assert, through genocide—to tiny minorities next to the huge populations of settlers and their descendants, who, of course, no longer think of themselves as settlers or colonists. Since there is no possibility of removing the invaders from these countries, the only outcome for those among the settlers' descendants who become aware of their nations' terrible histories is to feel the guilt that comes with having committed an original sin. The current practice, for example, of "land acknowledgments" to Native American groups that once occupied the territory on which a museum or university now sits, offers but a poor substitute for any genuine atonement. "The goal," Kirsch writes, "is not to change this or that public policy but to engender a permanent disaffection, a sense that the social order ought not to exist."

Naturally enough, beneath such a deep sense of cultivated alienation often lurks the potential for violence, or at least for the glorification of violence, since few people can sustain a sense of severe personal guilt without experiencing a corresponding desire to do something cathartic to remove that stain from themselves. Enter the case of Israel. Here, to these ideologues, one confronts a fairly recent example of a new nation seemingly formed through the displacement of most of its original inhabitants, and one in which the roughly equal number of Jews and Arab Palestinians (about 7 million each) in the lands of the former British Mandate (Israel, Gaza, and the occupied West Bank) make imaginable the theoretical, if thoroughly unrealistic, possibility of "decolonization." For leftists of many stripes, from anti-capitalist and antiracist fighters to environmentalists, feminists, and gay rights activists, the Israel-Palestine conflict provides, as Kirsch puts it, "a local address to a struggle that can otherwise feel all too abstract." It was but a short step from accepting this premise to the corollary of numerous groups and individuals on the left cheering on the murderous actions of Hamas on October 7, 2023.

Kirsch is hard-hitting against this ideology. He condemns its all-or-nothing, purist stance toward perceived social injustice, arguing instead for such moderate, reform-minded strategies of amelioration as those adopted in the past by the organizations of the civil rights movement of the 1960s or the National Congress of American Indians from the 1940s up through today. Such groups recognized that everything good and everything bad do not line up neatly on two separate sides in any conflict. Extremist ideologies like that of settler colonialism fail to see that migrations of people and displacement (or partial displacement) of one group by another, whether by force or by assimilation (or, as in the case of the Americas, Kirsch omits to add, principally by the inadvertent spread of disease), have been a common occurrence throughout human history. Naturally, such upheavals in the past were not carried out in ways that would meet today's standards of human rights and dignity; indeed, brutality and cruelty were more often the rule than the exception. But when revolutionary ideologies have occasionally taken power (as they did in eighteenth-century France and twentieth-century Russia and China),

Kirsch's vision entails a need for human beings to grasp the particulars of perceived social injustice with care and to proceed deliberately toward gradual changes that will produce more good than harm.

their attempts to radically restart history in the name of utopian ideals only succeeded in producing new atrocities atop the ones they believed they were avenging. Such disastrous ends would surely be the result if the settler-colonial ideologues' goal of "decolonizing Palestine" were to be put in motion. Hamas on October 7 offered a preview of just such a result.

Given that Kirsch has so plainly—and correctly, it seems to me—identified the settler-colonial misreading of the history of Israel and Palestine with the historic left, it is peculiar that he chooses to end his book with a mostly laudatory treatment of an essay, "On the Concept of History," written by the German Jewish Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin in 1940 while Benjamin was living in Paris, on the run from the Nazis. What Kirsch likes about this essay is Benjamin's reliance on the concept of despair to describe what history has meant for the majority of the world's people. Such a bleak vision of the past could certainly make sense for someone writing in the face of fascism's successful early conquests in Europe at that moment. But, in truth, the essay itself reveals Benjamin's outlook to derive less from his immediate circumstances and more from his commitment to what he calls historical materialism, the Marxist diagnosis of history as a record of "barbarism," a "tradition of oppression," against which only a decisive, revolutionary break with the past will deliver relief. All attempts to produce slow but steady "progress," Benjamin writes, are illusory and doomed to failure.[4] This is exactly the same extremist stance as that adopted by today's settler-colonial activists toward the social ills of the United States and Israel, with far less apparent justification than Benjamin's precarious position in 1940 might have provided.

Kirsch does in the end depart from Benjamin's maximalist outlook, so why privilege him with such extended treatment in the book's final chapter? I think Kirsch's decision to do so stems from a desire to add a religious dimension to his discussion. Benjamin was an unusual thinker of his era in astutely recognizing a religious longing beneath Marxist doctrine, even going so far in his "Concept of History" essay as to call historical materialism a puppet—he meant this as a positive characterization—whose strings were being pulled by theology. He was similarly at home in referring to his hoped-for revolution as the coming of the Messiah, an event he imagined as modeled after past moments of apocalyptic renewal that would wipe away all the despairs of history.[5] Kirsch clearly finds Benjamin's

4 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston: Mariner Books, 1968), pp. 196-209, esp. pp. 200 and 202.

5 Benjamin, pp. 196, 205-206, 209.

religio-political vision, based on the weighty notion of despair, compelling, but Kirsch rejects it in favor of what he calls a different kind of despair, one linked to a future that can find hope in repairing past wrongs through partial means of improvement. Kirsch believes he can find this second understanding of despair in portions of the Talmud, which, he relates, speak of the despair owners of lost or stolen articles like a garment, a donkey, or some coins, feel of ever recovering their possessions, especially once they have been passed along or resold to new and innocent parties. The Talmud's ancient rabbis urge the original owners to accept compensation of some other sort for these goods so as not to create new injustices.

The discipline of religious studies has names to apply to these two different visions of despair and redemption: premillennialism and postmillennialism. In the first, there can be no justice (no thousand years of happiness) until after the Messiah has come. In other words, the Messiah must appear before the millennium can begin; all is dark before that apocalyptic moment arrives, delivering its Day of Judgment. In the second, justice (the thousand years of happiness) comes gradually through small steps of improvement, culminating in the Messiah's return almost as an afterthought or reward. As Kirsch's entire critique of the settler-colonial ideology makes clear, the author sides with the second of these redemptive visions, entailing a need for human beings to grasp the particulars of perceived social injustice with care and to proceed deliberately toward gradual changes that will produce more good than harm. But it is not evident to me how framing this choice in religious terms, as Kirsch does, helps bring about his admirable goal. If anything, the history of conflict in the Middle East suggests how frequently competing religious authorities have made compromise and small improvements difficult to achieve.

Kirsch's turn toward religion at the end of his book, not to mention his elevation of Walter Benjamin's thought, also obscures his earlier identification of the settler-colonial ideology as part of a longstanding leftist political tradition. This tradition owes more to the romantic distortions of psychological alienation from modern, capitalist society, to which intellectuals have so often been susceptible, than to any genuinely religious impulse. The discomfort left-wing intellectuals, often well-to-do themselves, feel from their participation in modern Western societies best explains the ideology's underlying guilt, and the way in which Israel has come to function as a convenient and vulnerable stand-in for these activists' more powerful home nations.

Instead of leaving readers with a choice between two different religious approaches, I suggest that Kirsch's work points to the need for a renewed focus on the political and social history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Throughout his study, Kirsch alludes to a number of counter-arguments taken from *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (2020), by Rashid Khalidi, probably the most prominent American historian writing about the conflict

from a pro-Palestinian perspective. Yet Kirsch fails sufficiently to rebut these arguments (a lack of precise footnotes doesn't help his attempts). Two favorable reviewers of Khalidi's book, both established scholars in the field of Middle Eastern Studies, have called it the best "single book" that they would now recommend both to students and general readers in order to understand the Israel-Palestine dispute.[6] His book has also made it onto *The New York Times*'s weekly best-seller list consistently since October 7, 2023.[7] Khalidi's observations deserve careful evaluation and explicit rebuttal, if only because his book has brought the settler-colonial ideology to countless readers and will continue to do so. There have been several critical reviews of the book, including a strong one by Benny Morris in *Jewish Review of Books*, but a much greater volume of critical commentary is needed in terms of both scope and influence in order to avoid losing this vital contest of ideas over Israel's legitimacy as a nation.[8]

Kirsch states at the outset of his study that he will not be addressing either the conduct of the current war in Gaza—an important subject of its own—or how to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict itself. However, toward the end of the book he does rather ambiguously endorse the idea of a future two-state settlement, presumably based roughly on the divisions of 1967. Indeed, this vision offers the only foreseeable way to resolve peacefully a dispute between two equally legitimate moral claims to the same piece of land, given the existing record of previous armed conflict. Khalidi, by contrast, endorses either the idea of a single Palestinian state in which Jews and Arabs somehow live together as equals or two separate states based roughly on the boundaries, drastically different from those within the region today, of the 1947 United Nations partition plan — both thoroughly unrealistic prospects.[9] Bridging this gap in goals and expectations will require intense negotiations, now pushed well into the future owing to Hamas's horrifying attack and the violence of the subsequent war in Gaza. Whenever these negotiations do begin, however, they will require the support of sober historical understanding, not the partisan distortions of ideology. ▲

6 Reviews in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 51.4 (2022):109-112, by Laila Parsons, Professor of Modern Middle East History, McGill University; and in *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 8.2 (2023), by Michael Vicente Perez, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Memphis, TN.

7 Khalidi's book had been on The *New York Times*'s best-sellers list for 33 weeks, as of June 2, 2024. See www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2024/06/02/paperback-nonfiction/

8 Benny Morris, "The War on History," *Jewish Review of Books*, Spring 2020. See also the valuable review by Michael Rubner in *Middle East Policy* 27.2 (Summer 2020): 173-177.

9 Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020), p. 251 outlines four possible options, but the weight of the book's overall argument falls on the third and fourth of these options, the two noted in my text.

Job Market
A Memoir

David Gerber

1970 was a poor time to be on the academic job market. The postwar expansion of higher education, that had created so many jobs for recipients of a doctorate, was ending. The country was not only in the midst of deep divisions over an unpopular war and protests over race, but the beginnings of a sharp contraction of the economy that would see an end to unprecedented prosperity that followed the world war. The children of the greatest generation's middle classes, like me, had grown up without ever being able to imagine the scarcity or insecurity that our parents remembered from their experience of the Great Depression and war. America became a consumer's paradise for its rapidly expanding middle class. Where this left a cohort of recent or about to be Doctors of Philosophy was up in the air. For me, the situation projected all the insecurities and confusions I possessed. The Age of Aquarius was no paradise, at least for me.

Not that I was conscious of much of this. I took the world as far as it concerned me pretty much for granted, or at least only dealt semi-consciously with my own confusion about my place in it. Mostly because, my parents' dysfunctional emotional lives aside, I had very little to feel knowingly apprehensive about. That dysfunction was all-encompassing, involving intersecting layers of infidelity, a near divorce, financial scandal, trusting the wrong people, and public embarrassment. But I lived with it, without much understanding of what its impact on me was. I might well have been entitled to be desperate, but instead I was clueless.

More than most adolescents I was laboring, awkward and confused, to create my own identity, a purpose, a trajectory, a path I could traverse mostly alone, because I didn't have much to guide me. I contracted a marriage to my high school girlfriend in the belief that I would be starting my own life anew at age twenty-three, and would be my own man at adult ground zero.

I had a lot of choices as I approached graduation from Northwestern in 1966, but they involved places, not pre-professional preparation. They came down to which law school or which graduate program in history. My father had wanted me to be a lawyer and go into practice with him. Should I have been attracted by the prospect of getting rich, being his partner putting together and taking apart insurance companies, and living in one of those instant affluent suburbs with a wife and the era's optimal three children? That didn't appeal to me. My father removed the burden of my telling him I wasn't interested by quitting the law and leaving town for an academic position in Arizona. Anyway, I did poorly on the LSAT. The questions made no sense to me, and I couldn't understand the logic that underlay the test. I tried to see what it had to do with law, and got distracted, kept looking at my watch, and in the middle of the test, decided to go to graduate school. What an irony was that? He wanted me to go into law, but became an academic around the same time that I embarked on that path. We both left the law around the same time.

Among the universities that invited me to join their program was Princeton, which gave me a guaranteed four-year fellowship. That appealed, to the extent I would not be dependent on my parents. The appeal wasn't

only the money. My idea was that I would contribute to rethinking American history in line with my not very thoughtful, but earnestly felt, New Left politics. There were three young professors there who were writing history to provide foundations for the contemporary Civil Rights Movement—not ideological hacks but creative minds working in the lonely heroic traditions of scholarship in the archives. We all believed in doing away with race as a way of defining people, and in integration, and hardly would have been able to grasp the problems those hopes faced, from every which direction.

This was hardly enough inspiration to sustain success in a program that wanted you to be an academic professional in pursuit of a career. That, I didn't understand at all, and probably didn't get the point until well into my own career. I thought of graduate school as the fifth year of the liberal arts curriculum. I would keep learning what happened in the past and maybe why it happened. Beyond that, I wanted to profess, maybe preach, more than to teach. I wanted to do research, time travel with my dead subjects and discover their moral lives and their purposes. I was looking for mentors among the dead, in proportion to the trouble I had connecting with authority around me. I always thought that writing history was about people, not about contributing to a literature, and this probably held me back. But it held me back from being something I didn't want to be: an academic statesman, the voice of the profession, and a cheerleader for the institution where I was employed. Groucho Marx has been looking over the shoulder, telling me not to join any club that would have me as a member.

I didn't fit in well in my first year at Princeton. I was lonely, and seemed to cultivate loneliness. That had been true at Northwestern as well. I didn't live in the Graduate College, the cloistered Gothic redoubt a mile or two from the campus, where the residents ate in a massive refectory (a word I had to look up), wearing academic robes. The evening meal began with grace said in Latin. I found a rooming house where I lived with a peculiar mix of people. There was one student who by coincidence was in the history department, and we became friends, but the other residents were an example of what to avoid in adult life. A World War II veteran who had taken a hatred of Asians out of the conflict, a Taiwanese ex-military officer and lower-level diplomat, an alcoholic who locked himself in his room and tried to drink himself to death, you name it. The Chinese diplomat and the American vet had a fist fight, and the alcoholic's brother had to come from Philadelphia to rescue him from his fetid, bottle-strewn room. I had never been far away from home before, and didn't make many friends. The friends I did make, including a former high school teacher from a small-town in Illinois whose complete lack of style and perpetual understatement concealed the wickedly anarchistic substructure of his personality, were as alienated from the prospect of being easily integrated into academic life as I was.

Antiwar activism helped to sustain me through that first year, as did my commitment to somehow getting on with a program, the nature of which continued to elude me, but even more sustaining was the thought that if I got married at the end of the year, I'd make a settled life for myself on the campus and not have to fit in.

What was this "fitting in" that I keep returning to? Being a Jew at Princeton was part of it, but I had also been a Jew at Northwestern, where the typical undergraduates in my classes seemed to be the daughters or the sons of the President of the First National Bank of Wapakoneta, Ohio. Everyone there was linked by some rules, about how to behave and what to value, that no one had ever bothered to explain to me. Now I was a stranger again, at Princeton, where I never attended an athletic event, ate at the venerable undergraduate eating clubs, or just hung around anywhere. There weren't a lot of my kind—urban Jews

among whom the Old World continued to lurk—but I wouldn't have sought them out anyway. I went to my classes on Yom Kippur and thought nothing of it.

Nor was it the impossibly distinguished provenance of the place, with its never-ending list of great men among the faculty, and it's undergraduate students recruited out of the nation's elite, relative to my humbler, near-immigrant origins. One grandfather had been a garment worker; the other walked through the slums of Chicago collecting a dollar there and there from poor people to pay for their life insurance. My family wasn't deeply educated, but my father had a law degree, earned during the depths of the Depression, and at some point, while I was at Princeton, he came to bear the title of "Professor." My Chicago cousins were all in college at the same time I was, and ultimately became professionals or married them. Anyway, the Princeton graduate students weren't children of privilege—all of us were on fellowships, and we were mostly not of the same social backgrounds as the undergraduates. Few Americans were. Many of the undergraduates there were of old, monied and prestigious families who were national players, not Midwestern regional ones, as at Northwestern, where I also felt out of it. Not fitting in was a characterological issue for me more than a social or cultural one. It was just me, as it remains.

I suppose I did well enough academically that first year: they didn't cancel my fellowship and kick me out of the program, to be seized by the Vietnam War draft when my student exemption was taken away. Maybe that was why they didn't do so. Everyone hated the war, faculty and students alike, but the former, especially among the World War II veterans, did not approve of the way the latter chose to oppose it. They might have been world-class intellectuals and scholars, and an outspoken Marxist aside, were probably mostly social democrats, with a few Rockefeller Republicans among them. But a submerged current of patriotism lurked among those who had fought in World War II, as did a conservative concern for the stability and integrity of the established institutions like Princeton that sustained civil society and in doing so sustained the American republic. A handful of us met with the dean of students, a distinguished academic in a beautifully tailored suit, and *demanded* that he not share student records with the Selective Service System. He actually agreed—without taking our names and threatening our fellowships. I lost track of the fate of that issue, and hence, whether he had agreed with us for the sake of clearing his office of riffraff, who were not to be taken seriously, but appeased in volatile times.

Through hard work and the stability that briefly came with marriage, I began to improve my performance in the second year of graduate school. I was taking courses in American history, and that made a great difference. I was working with younger faculty, who were much less intimidating, including those three eminent men I'd come to study with. A few of the other junior colleagues were as insecure as I was, and I must have sensed that. Those I liked the most never reached the stage of a permanent appointment, let alone a tenure vote. The faculty took on a few such recent Ph.Ds. at the time, ostensibly to test whether they had the right stuff. Few did, but they were told as they got their walking papers, that the recent past would look good on their CVs. I believe that, honorably, the Princeton department helped them find new positions. Two ended up at Rutgers, which some Princeton people look down on as the state university but which, within a few decades, came to have one of the finest history departments in the United States.

I passed my oral and written examinations, got praised for my performance, and went off to Columbus, Ohio, to spend a year doing research for a dissertation on what, at the time, was naively called "race relations," in a northern state between the Civil War and

World War I. My wife worked at the campus bookstore across High Street from the historical society, and we lived in a shabby student apartment in a neighborhood near Ohio State that was called "the capital of West Virginia." The convenience store across the street from our apartment seemed to get robbed every Friday afternoon about five o'clock, as one or another of our Mountain State neighbors gathered resources together for the weekend.

University of Michigan which I was completely unprepared for, and a better one some months later at Oberlin, as my marriage seemed to be disintegrating. Neither place wanted to hire me, and the market for me seemed to be vanishing. My talk with the chair of the Oberlin department wasn't about the job, but about marriages coming undone. He had some experience with that. He was very reassuring, but that conversation hardly made me an attractive prospect for his faculty.

He introduced me, and while I was considering the odd assembly around me and getting ready to perform, donning my imposter's intellectual costume, he requested that I refuse to be interviewed and then leave the campus.

We were back in Princeton in the fall of 1969, and I was writing my dissertation, while dealing with the persistent message from the faculty that I had best start looking for a job, because that year marked the end of their obligation to support me. By the time I started that search, the job market was constricting, spreading panic among the graduate students, though the whole idea of a career remained elusive for me. How do you make one? How do you impress people with your brilliance? What if you know you're not brilliant, but rather an imposter, making it up as you go along? I had a lot of insecurities as I embarked on a search that required me to impress people. At my very best, I was merely hardworking, and focused on completing tasks. It took me the entire day to write three pages of a draft of my dissertation, at least in the first year I worked on it. The damn thing turned out to be over 500 pages long and had to be bound in two volumes. The time away from my wife didn't do us any good. She had troubles I was barely aware of, and couldn't respond to, preoccupied as I was with trying to be an academic.

I had a disastrous job interview at the

But then in the spring of 1970, as hopelessness was spreading among the graduate students, and as campus after campus was dissolving in protests against the war, and on behalf of Black Power, I got a call to come for an interview at a well-reputed liberal arts college in the eastern Pennsylvania countryside. I had been recommended by the Director of Graduate Study in the Princeton department, Joseph Strayer, a most prestigious historian of the Middle Ages, and a tough, no-nonsense man whose face turned red like a warning beacon when he was agitated. He had a large unidentifiable bump on his forehead that was ominous. He had been the departmental chair for decades and should have had a pass when it came to doing more administrative work.

How they ever talked a man then in his mid-sixties with a brilliant career to take on the burden of helping people like me to find jobs and prevail in interviews, I can't know for certain. The way things worked then, and could rightly never work in the stricter meritocracy that now exists, was that the department seeking people to interview called

various history departments' directors of graduate study and asked whom they might have looking for a job who did, for example, the middle period of American History, with an emphasis on race and the struggles for Black equality. And who can you promise is just about done with the dissertation, so that we don't have to terminate them after only a few years as a non-performer? Strayer's extensive contacts in academia probably recommended him as a man who could use influence to place the department's doctoral students. He could have said, "No," but he didn't. A feeling of crisis was in the air about finding jobs for the graduate students, a matter of the credibility of the program and of the usual desire to cast off those they'd seen through their doctorates.

It was Strayer who identified me, a student he did not know and who had never worked with him for so much as a minute. Beyond finding out there was a position there, he knew nothing about the job, but he had determined that it seemed right for me. I did that field and was nearly done with my dissertation. The chairman at the Pennsylvania liberal arts college called me to invite me to the campus. There was urgency in his voice. Could I come at the end of that very week? They needed to fill the position immediately. What I failed to know was that they had no intention of filling it with me, no matter how much my brilliance was on display. Strayer called me into his office and prepared me. He called me "Mr. Gerba," and did not use my first name. (Another faculty member, equally very distinguished, called me "Mr. Jerbère," with a distinctly French lilt, for four years.) The stakes for me were great, he implied, and it would be a good place to start a career, even if you didn't necessarily want to stay there. The Princeton faculty said that about nearly every place where we interviewed, and assumed we all should aspire to move on up to the Ivy League. Jobs were at a premium, he said though he certainly didn't have to, and beggars can't be choosers, which he did not say, but was obvious at the time.

Early on a Friday morning Susan and I, now briefly reconciled, got in our tired, disreputable station wagon and drove to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, deep in the heart of Amish Country, which was becoming a bearded and bonneted theme park. I was relieved that the car made it the one hundred miles to Lancaster. My initial impression was that this was not a bad place to live, maybe stay married, raise kids, and be happy ever after. Then there was the campus, its stately nineteenth-century buildings proud and seemingly eternal, though more than a few were faux nineteenth century, and full of trees and plantings, green everywhere on that cool mid-spring morning.

I was determined to prevail. Here I'd make my stand as a much-needed addition to someone's faculty. A scholar who, you could bet, would be an exemplary instructor and well-published historian, with projects galore beyond my dissertation I could speak about to prove it, though they were nothing but notional at that point. I'd explain that I had exciting ideas about teaching "race relations" and that my dissertation was going to make a splendid, pathbreaking book, though only the latter half of that promise ultimately proved nearly true.

We parked near the history department, and I went to the chair's office, while a secretary promised to entertain Susan, who would meet us for lunch. The departmental chairman, greeted me, and took me into a nearby conference room, filled with faculty and many scruffy-looking students who effected that alternative look of liberal arts college students of the time that combined Che Guevara, Farmer Alfalfa, and the cast of *Hair*.

He introduced me, and while I was considering the odd assembly around me and getting ready to perform, donning my imposter's intellectual costume, he requested that I refuse to be interviewed and then leave the campus. I knew that I had not screwed up sufficiently yet to be excluded from consideration. I hadn't uttered a word. I was

dressed neatly, properly zipped up, combed, and wearing a tie. But it wasn't me who was the problem. Rather, it was the senior leadership of the college's faculty, which was engaged in a standoff with the History Department, its chair, most of the younger departmental colleagues, and an activist contingent of anti-war students. A young visiting professor, Henry Mayer, was a great favorite among the students, and had taken on a role as an inspiration for the anti-war movement on the campus, and for contemporary campus radicalism in general. Mayer had a one-year appointment, and that one year was coming to a close. Some faculty outside the department were outraged at his activism, that is to say, for encouraging behavior among the students that did not focus on taking final exams and quickly leaving for the summer. A campus without students, especially in those times, had a great deal to recommend to faculty who hated the disorder around them. I was interviewing to be his permanent replacement, though everyone in the room that morning hoped or, in the case of the students, demanded Mayer be interviewed for the permanent position. The interview would have been pro forma; everyone in the room wanted to hire him to join them permanently. If they brought in a reputable person who, weighing the situation politically and ethically, sided with the party of virtue and removed himself in protest, it was a sign that it would be an outrage to force Mayer to leave for his politics. It would also demonstrate that no one with any character would allow themselves to be interviewed under those circumstances. (As it turned out, Mayer left anyway, returning to California to live on a commune and become a part-time academic and fulltime opponent of the war.)

All this was explained to me succinctly and with just enough zeal that I knew they were serious and, in their way, principled. That is, principled except when it came to me, whom they had fashioned as a tool to prevail in an interfaculty conflict driven ultimately by insistent, radicalized students. Even I figured that out immediately, although I probably asked if the situation could be explained once more, not only to take in the details again but to gain some time to figure out what to do in the moment. I heard Strayer's voice in my head: the job market was poor; we had to take our opportunities where they presented themselves; prevail in this interview because you may not get another one. Three strikes and you're out, and I was facing my third strike.

If they brought in a reputable person who, weighing the situation politically and ethically, sided with the party of virtue and removed himself in protest, it was a sign that it would be an outrage to force Mayer to leave for his politics.

I responded that the situation was certainly unacceptable, that I was worse than inconvenienced, and that I would leave, as they requested. Though I didn't say it, I was mostly on their side in the politics of the situation. But more than that I felt a certain respect for Mayer being his own man and not, as I seemed to be, a prisoner of the job market. At that moment he seemed sort of inspirational and, not caring much about the impression he was making when his future was in the balance, brave in a foolhardy way.

Did the students in the room clap when I responded to the chairman? I don't recall, but a collective moment of smiles and thanks

happened. So, I said, let me collect Susan and we'll leave. But the chairman and the students wanted me to go beyond that moment's great refusal. The chair asked me to go through the scheduled second part of my interview: a meeting with the committee of senior faculty which had some administrative role, probably a veto, in appointments, and which was fundamentally opposed to Mayer's spending one more day than necessary on the campus. Then a student in the room asked me if I would address an antiwar rally scheduled for the campus that afternoon. Part of the agenda for that rally was to protest pushing Mayer out of consideration to be his own, permanent replacement. I said yes, to the former, because it seemed formally correct that I explain myself. But I said, certainly, no! to the latter—I knew that receiving a hero's welcome in a public ceremony, let alone giving the students a full-throated Venceremos, would be a disaster. Again I heard Strayer's voice in my head admonishing me, though I had no clear impression of what exactly he would want me to do. Clear out? Explain myself? Certainly not lead the campus antiwar movement—that I was sure of.

The chairman led me to the administration building, and into a cold, undecorated conference room with maybe twenty gentlemen, mostly middle-aged and older, all grim-looking, determined, and uncomfortable. While walking there I told him that I feared the consequences of staying and completing the interview, where everything I said would be on the record. But that now seemed decided. I feared leaving even more, which would have put me in a bad situation at Princeton. He said he'd take care to explain to Princeton what was happening on their campus and how I came to be involved in it, and that was, he added, a promise I could count on. But at this point, of course, I had no faith in him.

The chair of that faculty committee was an eminent professor of literature. Famous on their campus, he was blind, and he spoke in a most authoritative way. He questioned me as if it were a deposition and he was the aggressive defense attorney who was framing a strategy of logic rather than facts for defending someone he knew to be guilty. Few of his colleagues spoke; it was the two of us, and I was badgered here and there, and my statements parsed for what was revealed in his mind to be unprofessional or illogical. I seem to have held my own, maybe even got resistant, less because of principle than because I desperately wanted to be elsewhere and felt greatly inconvenienced. Finally, he tried a gambit that got me to say, in effect, "I'm out of here!" He cocked his head toward me and with that disconcertingly direct but opaque look of the very blind, said something like, "What if I told you some things about Mayer that reflect very poorly on him?" I replied that I didn't want to hear them, and thought they were none of my business, and that it was best at that point that I collect my wife and go back to Princeton. I got up, excused myself, and left.

On the way out, the chairman thanked me profusely and said he owed me lunch, which I refused. He explained that since it was Friday, the Amish outdoor market was active and that it was a great spectacle, fun, etc. Your wife will love it, all sorts of arts and crafts and baked goods. Here's how to get there.... I found Susan, who was immediately outraged on my behalf—on our behalf—when I explained the situation to her. We left the campus and went to the Amish market, where, reflecting our tight budget, we had Pepsi and popcorn for lunch, and then went home to New Jersey.

If I were to measure the passage of time that weekend by the workings of my anxiety, it probably felt like a decade. How was I going to explain the situation to Strayer, who did post-interview meetings with those of us on the job market? Would he sympathize, or tell me I was a damn fool, and the department was finished trying to assist me, if I couldn't assist myself? I had no one to talk to about what had happened or what I was to say to Strayer about

the way I had dealt with it. Why I didn't confide in a friend among the graduate students, I can't say. Maybe I was just embarrassed to have a problem. The same, I think, for the faculty I'd worked with, embarrassed but also apprehensive. The story was so complicated that I feared wasting their time. Sadly, it never occurred to me to call my father and ask him what to do. He was now an academic and had many years of legal and administrative experience. But I had just stopped counting on him. He had so many issues of his own. Now I think it would have touched him deeply if I had asked his advice. But now I'm a father of adult children, who rarely want my advice.

Monday morning loomed before me like the hour at which I would face a firing squad. I rehearsed the entire weekend various versions of what I would say to Joseph Strayer, how I might piece together my narrative to give the impression of being aggrieved but not seeming a hapless victim. I thought, tough old guy that he was, he'd respond to that. Whining never does anyone any good, anyway. He's more likely to understand me, if I am angry, yet in control of myself, smolder, the manly way by that era's standards. The way we were instructed to behave by John Wayne characters in World War II combat movies.

There I was on Monday at his office door at nine o'clock. I had to wait an agonizing few moments while he finished a phone call. I entered and he told me to sit down. "Well, Mr. Gerba, how did it go?" Deciding that this was not the time to let him know what my surname was, but still confused how he could read my student file and continue to get my name wrong, I began to explain Friday's developments. His face turned red and then got redder. I thought that mysterious bump on his forehead would explode. He seemed at a loss for words, which I found terrifying under the circumstances. He looked at me, and in the full force of what I took to be outrage said, "They can't do this to us! We're Princeton!"

And for that one moment, I was, too. A

3 LITERARY LIVES

An Immaculate Blend of Art and Pedagogy

Alexander Schmid

Dante: Inferno to Paradise, Episodes 1 & 2.
PBS, 2024. Directed by Ric Burns.

In the opening shot of the opening episode of *Dante: Inferno to Paradise*, a candle atop a leather-bound volume flickers as the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley scroll in a three-line stanza across the screen, closely followed by a second stanza made up of two lines.

> Poets are the mirrors
> of the gigantic shadows
> which the future casts upon the present.
>
> Poets are the unacknowledged
> legislators of the world.
>
> -Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1821

The choice of an author from the English Romantic tradition, who is best known for his fourteen-line sonnet *Ozymandias*, and composed the poem quoted above exactly five hundred years after Dante's death may seem an odd addition, particularly to the introduction of such an important and culturally important piece of art to both Italy and the U.S. Is Dante—who is portrayed moving in a shadowy hue across the background—the mirror of the giant shadow cast upon the present? Though one may at first think of Dante more as the illuminating candle than a reproducer of shadow, one understands that Shelley's prophetic words relate to Dante's enduring influence on the present, acknowledged or not.

The imagery of Dante's poem fits the imagery of the opening scene, where a candle in the reddish foreground fades from focus, and the background, green in hue, impressionistically takes on changing shapes, including a moving figure, ostensibly Dante, wandering through the *selva oscura* (dark forest) with which his text first opens. We are then treated to a sight that will often be repeated during the course of the documentary's first two episodes: Dante writing his *Commedia*, while Antonio Fazzini, the actor

portraying Dante, speaks his first seminal lines—the first lines of the poem in this case—and then translates them into English, while a pensive, harp-filled strumming accompanies the scene. This all serves to set the ambient mood of the entire endeavor, filled with shadow, flickering light, motion, gentle music, and foregrounds and backgrounds with shifting focuses.

It has now been over thirty years since Amilcare Iannucci first identified a major problem with adaptations of Dante's work: they are either too pedagogical, and therefore not entertaining, or they are too avant-garde or impressionistic and lose their connection to the source material. In this particular blend of the artistic and the educational, however, first conceived by the Italian scholar Riccardo Bruscagli and the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning director Ric Burns, one finds an adaptation which features an impressive assortment of excellent acting, good camera shots of historical locations, the characters, and art, and some of the top Dante scholars from around the world giving expert and interesting commentary, which is seamlessly adhered to the adaptation itself.

This is a work far removed from the efforts of diametrically differing artists in the 1980s: Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips' 1985 work *A TV Dante*, made by the BBC and never finished, and the Italian *Dipartimento Scuola Educazione*'s one-hundred-part 1988 series on Dante.[1] Whereas Phillips' and Greenaway's work has been described as "as local and self-reflective as the original text," the purpose of RAI Television's adaptation was explicitly educational, though the project did desire to reach a larger public.[2] Jump forward thirty-five years, and we have an effort that I think Iannucci (as critic), and Greenaway, Phillips', and RAI (as artists) would acknowledge as the clear heir to each of their efforts, as well as the innovator that improved on the artistic methods and purpose of its predecessors.

Part of the success of the first episode of *Dante: Inferno to Paradise* is surely the brilliant mix of media which enriches the artistic value and diversity offered by the production. For example, there are professional readings done of lines from the *Inferno*, full of pathos and agony—particularly when Francesca weeps out her narcissistic invective against love and God. These are accompanied by Brian Keane's tone-setting music, often featuring somber and sustained deep notes, and images of scenes from the *Comedy* from medieval illuminated manuscripts too. Add to these shots of Dante accompanied by Virgil actually moving throughout his narrative: up the dark forest mountain; then through the gate of hell; seeing Charon and Minos, and then weeping Francesca as well as state-of-the-art sound and effects, and one has an extremely immersive aesthetic experience.

Not only does the first episode tell the story of Dante's *Inferno*, it tells the story of his early life, fascination with Beatrice, entrance into political affairs, and his subsequent exile at the hands of Charles of Valois, Pope Boniface VIII, and the Black Guelphs they had thrown their civic and ecclesiastical force behind. These deepen and darken the already somber mood of Dante's *Inferno*, itself an artistic representation of a place of eternal

1 Amilcare Iannucci, "Dante, Television, and Education," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 10 (1989): 1-2.

2 Andrew Taylor, "Television, Translation, and Vulgarization: Reflections on Phillip's and Greenaway's *A TV Dante*," In *Dante, Cinema, and Television*. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 146, and Iannucci, ibid.

punishment. The punishment Dante endures in this world, however, is drawn parallel to his *Inferno* in order to enhance the reader's understanding of Dante's motivation to write such a work, and to include so many contemporary and near contemporary individuals in it. A case in point would be Filippo Argenti, a nobleman who once struck Dante in the street. As Dante crosses the River Styx on board a vessel piloted by Phlegyas, Argenti attempts to board the vessel with vicious anger, and he is appropriately scorned by Dante. The implication is that Argenti earned his place among the wrathful in hell for the pain he inflicted on Dante outside of the text.

The scholars who have speaking roles in this project are all influential in the field of Dante studies and most come from top universities in the United States and Europe.[3] Rather than dominate the audio-visual space, as in a university lecture, each scholar's perspective is smoothly integrated into the narrative and serves to contextualize and revivify the significance of each of Dante's scenes.

The most difficult task of any educator or entertainer teaching or adapting Dante's work is this: how to make his medieval, Catholic world relevant to contemporary secular Europeans and Americans, at least. Roberto Bruscagli offers the best summation of how to bridge the gap between Dante's 14th century religious poem and our 21st century.

> You don't go into a retreat.
> You forget about yourself.
> You accept the challenge of the world.
> You relate it to any sort of human experience,
> and that friction will save you.
> That confrontation will reveal what you are
> and what you should be.
> It's actually opening up to the world that you
> save yourself, and you find a path of salvation.
>
> (1:05:02-1:05:36)

Bruscagli claims that the world will challenge one, and that if one meets the challenge of the world, whether Christian or otherwise, the confrontation will reveal to one's self what one is and what one should be. In this way, Bruscagli claims that Dante's poem can serve to reorient one and to help find one's place in the *selva oscura* (dark forest) of life, and that in any age and at any age, this experience is of insurmountable (tropological) value.

Episode II, Resurrection: Continuing from Heaven to Hell

In juxtaposition and slight contrast to the opening of Episode One, the opening shot of the second episode, *Resurrection*, features a clear Dante in the foreground of a dark, candlelit room which is blurrily represented in the background. Rather than rely on the words of another poet, *Resurrection* begins with Dante powerfully addressing the reader in an act of literary

3 They are: Riccardo Bruscagli, Teodolinda Barolini, Lino Pertile, Elena Lombardi, Heather Webb, Catherine Adoyo, Claudio Giunta, Theodore Cachey, Manuele Gragnolati, Giuseppe Ledda, Timothy Verdon and Guy Raffa. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 146, and Iannucci, ibid.

apostrophe. Dante describes the experience of witnessing the deep abyss of the final infernal and frozen river of hell, Cocytus, with dread Lucifer at its center. In an act that will conclude both his *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, Dante hedges this claim by suggesting that his words fall short of the matter they seek to describe, invoking what Dante scholars call the ineffability *topos*. From this final moment in Hell, the documentary quickly follows Dante and Virgil, for the topic of the second episode is Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. As Dante and Virgil exit the infernal region, they make their way to the island and mountain of Purgatory, where Cato awaits them.

The second episode carries the weight of two-thirds of Dante's poem, and the second two of the three canticles that comprise the poem. This itself reflects a critical judgment concerning the public accessibility and public assessment of the second and third places of the afterlife. The *Purgatorio* is very human: there time elapses; physical effort is expended and exhaustion gives rise to rest and dreams. Suffering is present in Purgatory, but it is expiatory in nature and therefore partakes of the nature of a progressive training rather than a perpetual torment, like hell.

It is hard to say why a world so akin to our own is less interesting to the public than is the *Inferno*. This is perhaps due to the enduring Romantic influence on how the American public, in particular, receives Dante. The Romantics read *Inferno*, and loved its vivid imagery and visualizations of torment. The work became something like a macabrely fascinating exposé on the sexually repressed and therefore overly creative medieval mind. This reception, however, is missing not only two-thirds of the poem, but the correct triptych-style understanding which a complete reading and rendering of the poem affords. The PBS adaptation, however, does a good job of integrating the two remaining canticles, regardless of their lesser popularity, maintaining a consistency of style but also adding unique elements to the representation of each canticle.

Purgatory has a physical existence in Dante's world: it is located on an island mountain in the southern hemisphere, which was created due to the physical fall of Lucifer into the middle of the earth. Purgatory as a realm is a place of hope, change, transformation, and earthly time where both discipline and the prayers of those close to one can help expiate and expurgate one's sins. Manuele Gragnoloti describes Purgatory in the following way:

> One can understand the process of Purgatory
> as that which allows the soul precisely
> to go out of its own obsessions.
> One can think of Hell as the rigidity of identity.
> It's like continuing to be stuck
> in one's own obsessions, in the past.
> Purgatory is the therapy that allows the soul
> to abandon all that rigidity.
>
> (19:27-19:56)

Dante's poem is a poem for every person, and was written to show each person that they matter and should take care of themselves because of this.

Purgatory also allows the documentarians to illustrate the seeming unfairness of Dante's vision of the afterlife. Figures like Cato of Utica and Manfred, son of Frederick II, cause one to question what the justice of Purgatory truly is. Cato was a contemporary of Virgil and committed suicide following Pompey the Great's defeat to Julius Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalia (48 BCE). Because he was both a pagan and a suicide, many readers are led to question "the justice of God" which allows for him to guard Purgatory, while pagan Virgil, who did not commit suicide, remains condemned to hell. Add to this the vicious actions of Manfred, who died by violence, and himself was excommunicated not once, but twice, and one realizes that Dante is representing God's justice as far more complicated than may at first meet the eye.

Besides focusing on the structure and philosophical underpinnings of Purgatory, the second episode also details Dante's exile following the year 1301, his stays in both Verona and Ravenna, and the deeply moving and crushing blow to the Italian spirit in 1309 when the Pope moved the seat of the papacy from Rome to Avignon, as is figured by the "giant" and the "harlot" he first assaults and then absconds with in *Purgatorio* 32.151-160. It is also in the final locale of Purgatory, the Earthly Paradise, that Virgil leaves Dante and is replaced by the *antica fiamma* (ancient flame), Beatrice, for whom he has been searching his entire journey.

Just under one hour into the second episode, Dante and Beatrice ascend to Celestial Paradise which is itself "accommodated" to the perceptions of humans, though the nature of its existence surpasses human perception. All souls in Celestial Paradise exist in the Empyrean, the tenth heaven beyond space and time, but they have organized themselves in order to accommodate themselves to human perception, for Dante, and for us. This allows Beatrice to guide Dante through the Ptolemaic cosmos (the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, the *Primum Mobile*, and the Empyrean). The spirits in Dante's *Paradiso* are less embodied than those in Purgatory and Hell and take on the form often of sparks and lights which descend to illuminate Dante's understanding on metaphysical issues like predestination and the justice of God.

Additionally, the latter half of the second episode focuses on the drama of finding the final thirteen cantos of Dante's *Paradiso* after his death and the search for them by two of Dante's sons, Jacopo and Pietro. Boccaccio, the great poet of the Italian vernacular from the generation

following Dante, tells us an extraordinary story concerning the year following Dante's death and how his final cantos were discovered. Just eight months after Dante's death, his son Jacopo revealed that he had had a vision of his father at night, in a dream. And in the dream, Dante showed his son a place, a small cavity, on the wall, in which they find the mildewed and nearly rotten papers of Dante's final thirteen cantos. Jacopo went to that same place in reality following his dream, and he found the same nearly rotten papers and immediately copied them down and joined them to the rest of the poem. Though the final canticle of Dante's poem is often considered the least dramatic of the three, the history surrounding its final discovery and completion provides what the text itself may lack.

What is the importance of Dante on the modern viewer, ultimately? Why should one spend the time to watch a documentary on a 14th century Florentine poet? What message could he possibly have to communicate to both believers and secular individuals in the Anglophone world today? Roberto Bruscagli answers this question tersely and poignantly. Dante's poem is a poem for every person and was written to show each person that they matter and should take care of themselves because of this. In his final lines of the documentary, Bruscagli says:

> Take care of it.
> Take care of it.
> Your life matters.
>
> (1:53:04-1:53:14)

And so does Dante's relevance and influence continue to this day because at least one of his messages is absolutely universal: even a single human life has value, so treasure it if it is yours, and care for it as something of infinite value. *A*

The Resilience of Sicilian Puppet Theater
Present and Future

Jo Ann Cavallo

As television became widely available throughout Italy in the late 1950s, puppet theaters lost their traditional audience and ceased offering nightly performances. This crisis is captured in the film segment *Gli ultimi pupari* (1967) in which, despite his best efforts, the last remaining puppeteer cannot attract audience members beyond a single (and overly demanding) habitual spectator, a leftover from the golden days when the public knew the stories as well as the maestro. The two protagonists, played by the Italian comic actors Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia, invert the roles of puppeteer and spectator amidst disagreements and infelicitous results, until not only does the puppet theater close, but one of them appears to be dead.

In the end, they embrace their shared love for the art form and join forces as puppeteers to stage a play to an empty theater. Yet it is their irrepressible passion—even in the absence of an audience—that saves the tradition since, in this final scene, against all expectation, a crowd of children has gathered, and we witness countless faces expressing rapturous enjoyment. This bittersweet wish-fulfilment fantasy seems to suggest that if puppeteers would only continue to follow their passion, a new generation of spectators would miraculously arrive to fill the theaters.

In the real world outside the film, of course, things could never be that simple. Puppeteers—with the help of key supporters and sustainers —have worked for decades to keep their art alive by actively seeking out spectators. The new audiences, consisting primarily of schoolchildren and tourists, have led to a drastic change in the repertory: the vast cycle of intricately interwoven plays formerly lasting a year or more has been reduced to a very limited number of single plays designed to entertain a public unfamiliar with the stories and, in the case of foreign visitors, often not able to comprehend the dialogue.[1]

Then on March 9, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian government forced all theaters to close their doors amidst a general lockdown that prohibited any gathering deemed non-essential. This was followed in October of 2021 with a national law that mandated vaccination (or testing every other day) in order to gain access to commercial spaces, including cafés, restaurants, and theaters. I wondered: would the already endangered *Opera dei Pupi* tradition be able to rebound after these draconian measures?

Ironically, during the same period in which I was barred from travel to Italy due

1 My *Athenaeum Review* article, titled "The Substance of Sicilian Puppet Theater: Past and Present" (Issue 3, winter 2020), discusses both the traditional Paladins of France cycle and the plays most popular in recent years.

to the COVID-19 restrictions, I had the unprecedented opportunity to view Sicilian puppet plays right in my living room. Between February and October of 2021, the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino in Palermo hosted a program of online performances, titled the "Sicilian Puppets Series," in order to support the puppeteers on the island who were being deprived of their livelihood. For the first time, I had an inkling of what it must have felt like to be a habitual spectator, as I watched the screenings via Facebook with a small group of "regulars" who were reacting to the action in real time. The puppeteers, who found themselves potentially reaching a new global audience, naturally staged some familiar favorites.[2] But they also ventured out to expand their repertory and introduce viewers to stories from the Paladins of France cycle that had not been performed in decades. I was able to view, for example, a performance of the enamorment of Orlando's parents Berta and Milone (*Gli amori di Berta e Milone*) and of Orlando's birth in Sutri (*Come Orlando nacque in Sutri*).[3]

For various reasons, it was not until March of 2024 that I could finally return to Sicily, and while my trip had official purposes—presenting a volume I recently edited, and also giving a seminar on my work— my burning desire was to attend *Opera dei Pupi* plays and speak with puppeteers about how they were faring. Although I had followed the news posted by the various companies on Facebook, it was not clear to me what I would encounter on the ground. I was relieved to find—as the title of this piece already suggests—that puppeteers continue to practice their art with passion, tenacity, and creativity. Moreover, in marked contrast to the resolution of *Gli ultimi pupari*, an essential part of their strategy is a careful consideration of their various target audiences. As Giacomo Cuticchio remarked in a recent conversation with my students, "Theater does not exist without an audience; therefore, we need each other."[4] This essay aims to offer a snapshot of puppet theater in Sicily today, in particular Palermo and Catania, with attention to how companies craft their performances for distinct groups of spectators: first, students from both primary and secondary schools in Sicily; second, foreign tourists; third, local residents; fourth, international audiences on a large scale; and fifth, special groups.[5]

1. Primary and Secondary Schoolchildren

Performing for schoolchildren is a regular part of the work of many companies.[6] In fact, while the Figli d'Arte Cuticchio did not have any plays scheduled on their website during the period I was in Palermo—and I feared I'd miss an occasion to see them perform—Giacomo Cuticchio graciously invited me to attend two morning performances that he had planned for student

2 For example, three classics representing different stages in the life of the paladin Orlando, staged by Salvatore Bumbello's Compagnia Brigliadoro, can still be viewed on the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette's Facebook page: *L'infanzia di Orlando* (https://www.facebook.com/MuseoMarionette/videos/1487751737520 77); *Orlando conquista le armi* (https://www.facebook.com/MuseoMarionette/videos/803875843878313); and *Il duello di Orlando e Rinaldo per amore della bella Angelica* (https://www.facebook.com/MuseoMarionette/videos/822211525343606).

3 Both plays, performed by the Compagnia Marionettistica Fratelli Napoli of Catania, are available on the Museum's youtube.com channel (www.youtube.com/@museomarionettea.pasqualin3548).

4 "Incontro con Giacomo Cuticchio."

5 Although several companies perform for distinct audiences depending on the occasion, I discuss the most notable examples for each category based on my viewing experience.

6 In a recent news report on the Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli of Catania staging a play at a local secondary school, the students appear just as entralled as the children in the final scene of *Gli ultimi pupari* (Scardaci, "Teatro dei pupi a scuola").

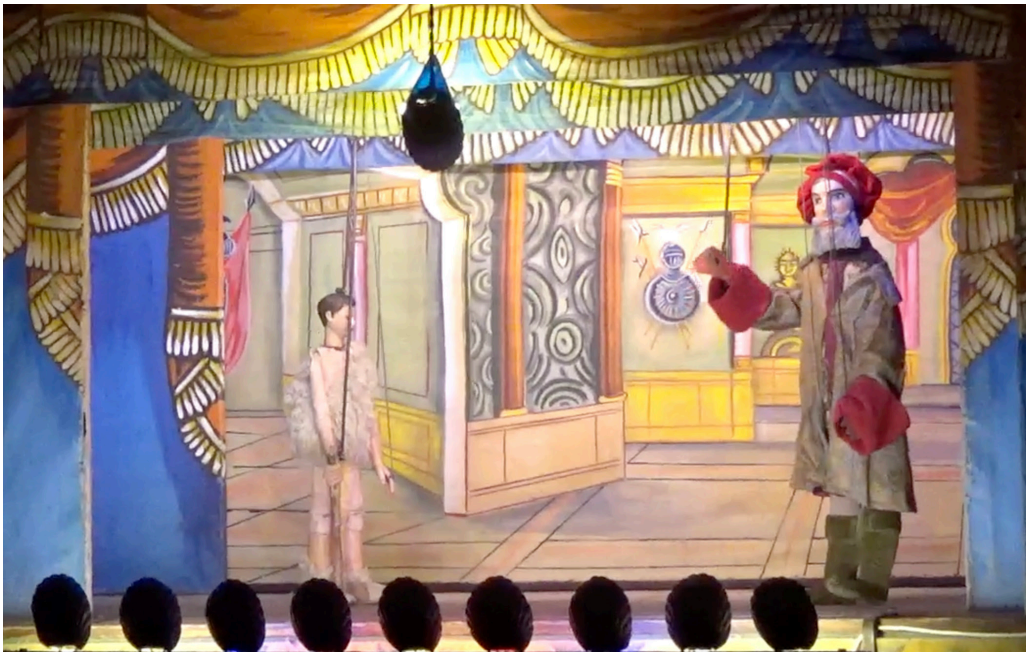

Figure 1 Orlandino and the Governor, Figli d'Arte Cuticchio, *L'infanzia di Orlando*, Palermo, March 18, 2024.

groups visiting the family's theater.[7] The plays staged were chosen with the ages of the spectators in mind: *L'infanzia di Orlando* for primary school children and the *Iliad* for youths in secondary school. In both cases, the groups were welcomed first into the Cuticchio family's laboratory where they learned the basics of the tradition, such as the definition of *burattino* (hand puppet), *marionetta*, e *pupo*.

The first play, which details Orlandino's vicissitudes as a young boy living in poverty with his single mother, brought home how a story made famous by Andrea da Barberino (c.1370-c.1431) could be utterly relevant today. The play elicited laughter through Orlandino's zesty mispronunciation of names, but also endeared the character to the audience through his earnestness, his love for his mother, and his willingness to stand up for himself. In one scene, Orlandino is bullied by the governor's son, who deprives him of a prize he rightfully won in a contest. When the enraged boy states the facts to the governor, the latter, rather than taking his son's side, asks the audience whether they corroborate Orlandino's story (Figure 1). The children's hearty shouts in the affirmative attest to their level of emotional participation. Orlandino's vindication thus comes about due to both the forthrightness of the governor and the eagerness of the schoolchildren in the audience to act as witnesses to the truth.

The Figli d'Arte Cuticchio's *Iliad* was remarkably faithful to Homer's poem in its staging of the principal episodes. The puppets were constructed specifically for this production with armor and clothing meant to echo ancient Greece, rather than medieval

7 Giacomo Cuticchio is a puppeteer, composer, and pianist who regularly collaborates with his father, Mimmo Cuticchio, on both traditional and original productions. For more information, see his website (https://www.giacomocuticchio.it/).

Figure 2 Giacomo Cuticchio with Homeric puppet Phoenix and Jo Ann Cavallo, *Iliad*, Figli d'Arte Cuticchio, Palermo, March 19, 2024.

Italy. Some of the puppets' faces remained unpainted, yet were somehow just as expressive with their wooden features (Figure 2). Giacomo lent voice to the characters, while he and his fellow puppeteers handled the puppets from behind the stage. Mimmo Cuticchio operated the cylinder piano throughout most of the performance, but he stepped forward to recount the final scene of the reconciliation between Priam and Achilles. This concluding summary, both part of and external to the performance, brought out the poignancy of two sworn enemies, each grieving for loved ones killed in the war, who are nonetheless able to find common ground in their humanity.[8]

2. Tourists

All Sicilian puppet theater companies stage plays for tourists who will most likely attend a single show for a taste of local folklore tradition. The most popular episode in Palermo is the duel between Rinaldo and Orlando over Angelica, which condenses an extended narrative sequence from Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* into about an hour-long performance.[9] The puppeteer Enzo Mancuso did not have any performances announced on his website during the days I was in town; nonetheless, he invited me to attend a play that he had scheduled for a private group of American tourists. He would have gladly staged a lesser-known play that afternoon, but the group organizer had expressly requested *Il duello di Orlando e Rinaldo*.

The location of Mancuso's Teatro Carlomagno near the Palermo Cruise Terminal makes it a natural choice for tour operators. Yet I imagine that it is not simply the proximity to cruise ships that brings groups to his theater, but also Mancuso's readiness to engage with spectators to help them understand both the tradition and the stories. Before the performance, Mancuso introduced Sicilian puppet theater as well as the play itself, during intermissions he explained the upcoming action, and at the conclusion he thoughtfully replied to the group's many questions (Figure 3). He thus not only embodied passion for his art but—judging from the enthusiastic response of my compatriots—succeeded in making it both exciting and comprehensible.

Today Palermo continues to have multiple puppet theaters. In addition to Enzo Mancuso's Teatro Carlomagno and the previously mentioned Figli d'Arte Cuticchio, there were three companies performing on a regular basis when I visited. Salvatore Bumbello (Compagnia Brigliadoro) was performing daily at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette. As Bumbello explained to me, since the audience consisted mostly of tourists who would see a single performance, the company performed the same play on consecutive days for a month before changing. The play chosen for March was the ever-present duel between Orlando and Rinaldo for Angelica. Nevertheless, Bumbello expressed the desire to perform a mini-cycle, in particular so that his children, who assisted him, would not be bored constantly repeating the same plays.

In the time since my previous visit to Palermo, Franco Cuticchio had moved his workshop to the street behind his theater, allowing him more space to work and display his puppets and other materials. When I stopped by in the morning, Franco was constructing a puppet in his workshop while his partner was in the theater explaining the tradition to a young couple. That afternoon he performed the *Assedio di Parigi* (Siege of Paris) which, despite its title, also

8 The play debuted on the larger stage and continues to be performed for international audiences, including, most notably, in Athens, Greece, in January of 2023. For links to various articles about the play, see the "Homer in Sicilian Puppet Theater" page on eBOIARDO.

9 When I visited the University of Palermo in March, I asked students and faculty what puppet plays they had seen. With one exception, everyone I queried had seen precisely this play, sometimes with their parents or through their schools.

Figure 3 Enzo Mancuso answering audience's questions via a translator, *Duello di Orlando e Rinaldo per Angelica*, Teatro Carlomagno, Palermo, March 19, 2024.

centered around the rivalry between Orlando and Rinaldo over Angelica. As he later explained, he alternates plays on a monthly basis in the off season, but during the summer alternates plays daily so that tourists may return multiple times. His most frequently staged stories, he noted, are the arrival of Angelica in Paris, the vicissitudes of Bradamante and Ruggiero, Dama Rovenza, and the young Orlando winning his armor and sword.

In the center of Palermo, near the Cathedral, the Argento family (Teatro Agramante) was holding afternoon performances of a play titled *I fatti di Orlando* (The Deeds of Orlando). Although I wasn't able to see the performance, I did catch of glimpse of the family patriarch, Vincenzo Argento, when I passed by his shop on Via Vittorio Emanuele one morning as he was explaining the construction of a puppet to a couple of visitors.

3. Local Audiences

The Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli of Catania did not have any plays announced on their website during the month of March. Nonetheless, a couple weeks before my trip to Sicily, Alessandro Napoli posted on his Facebook page an excerpt from a speech by a young female knight. A few Facebook friends, including fellow puppeteers, tried to guess the identity of the knight in question—but to no avail. Finally, Alessandro revealed the mysterious character's identity by posting the announcement of an upcoming play titled *Come Bradamante divenne la Tigre di Montalbano* ("How Bradamante Became the Tiger of Montalbano"). But the mystery was only partially solved, since the speech quoted did not fit Bradamante's story in the literary tradition.

Figure 4 Bradamante and Peppinino, *Come Bradamante divenne la Tigre di Montalbano*, Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli, Catania, March 17, 2024.

The subtitle, "Spettacolo tradizionale di Opera dei Pupi di stile Catanese" ("traditional play in the Catanese *Opera dei Pupi* style"), provided the missing clue. As Alessandro later explained, the dialogue he cited had been devised by Catanese puppeteers who developed the story of Bradamante's emergence as a knight to give prominence to this female warrior and to celebrate the enterprising strength of women more generally. The Napoli family had not performed their version of this story since 1972, therefore, in response to Alessandro's Facebook post, I asked: Would it be crazy for me to travel from Palermo to Catania for the day to see the show? My question was answered when one *appassionato* of Sicilian puppet theater replied that he was ready to travel from his home in Orléans, France, in order not to miss it.

As it turned out, my French colleague and I were the only two non-Italians in the audience, an audience which—from what I could tell from the conversations before the play and the Q&A after—was composed almost exclusively of locals. I had viewed open-air puppet theater performances in the summer that brought together both locals and vacationers, but this was the first time I felt that the puppeteers expected the audience to be primarily Sicilian. Although Bradamante was the featured protagonist, in reality she shared the spotlight with the Catanese mask Peppinino who spoke extensively in dialect and provided a link between the public and the aulic chivalric characters (Figure 4).

Following the performance, audience members kept asking questions and engaging in a dialogue with the company. This prompted Fiorenzo Napoli to have family members bring out historical *cartelli* (posters), two exquisite puppets that he had constructed, and examples of the family's handwritten

scripts. It is undeniable that the days of staging a year-long cycle of consecutive plays based on the *Storia dei Paladini* have long passed, and yet that evening the Fratelli Napoli proved beyond any doubt that we are not past the time when puppeteers can dramatize traditional stories that will captivate a local adult audience.

4. The Big Stage: Global Audiences

The puppeteer and *cuntista* (storyteller) Mimmo Cuticchio is well-known beyond the confines of Sicily not only for staging the Paladins of France cycle, but also for creatively adapting canonical dramatic narratives across time and space, from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to *Macbeth*, to *A Thousand and One Nights*.[10] The combination of Mimmo Cuticchio's theatrical direction, Giacomo Cuticchio's musical compositions, and Tania Giordano's artistic elaborations have led to several productions in recent years, with Mimmo, Giacomo, and Tania also teaming up on stage to transmit life to the puppets. In 2019, just prior to the pandemic, the company staged a magnificent original puppet opera performance entitled *Medusa*. The play brought to life the backstory of this mythological character, the tragic account of the girl's rape by Poseidon and her subsequent punitive transformation into a monster by Athena. The filmed version which debuted in 2021 captures the emotional impact of the story through the expressive gestures of the puppets while also underscoring the coordinated efforts of the orchestra, choir, soloist and puppeteers.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Associazione Figli d'Arte Cuticchio worked on updating their archives and created various new plays to transmit via live streaming. Their retrospective series, titled *Il Teatro di Mimmo Cuticchio – Dalla piccola alla grande Scena – 1971/2021*, offered to the public a rare chance to view online select plays filmed during the company's fifty years of activity.[11] The subtitle brings home the fact that throughout this period the company developed creative new productions for the big stage ("*grande scena*") that could tour the world while at the same time continuing to perform on the small stage ("*piccola scena*") of their theater in Palermo.

In 2021, for the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri, Mimmo Cuticchio conceived of a film using puppets to reimagine key moments of Dante's voyage through Hell. *Sulle vie dell'Inferno* debuted at the Associazione Figli d'Arte Cuticchio's yearly festival, *La macchina dei sogni*, with this particular edition featuring puppet theater shows, multimedial and oral performances, exhibitions, and workshops dedicated to the *Divine Comedy*.[12] Although the action was projected on film, the voices of Mimmo Cuticchio speaking in prose and of an actor reading Dante's verses were live, as was the orchestra performing music composed by Giacomo Cuticchio. As Giacomo later explained to me, the limited number of people allowed in the room due to the COVID-19 restrictions meant that a larger orchestra would have necessarily reduced the size of the public. He therefore opted for a 6-piece ensemble comprised of two synthesizers and four instruments (violin, cello, trombone, and saxophone).

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10 For a comprehensive list of Mimmo Cuticchio's new theatrical productions between 1967 and 2016, see Venturini, "Teatrografia di Mimmo Cuticchio." For his succinct biography in English, see Venturini, "Mimmo Cuticchio."

11 More information on this initiative can be found at https://www.figlidartecuticchio.com/teatro-cuticchio-piccola-grande-scena-streaming-1971-2021. The streaming of the content is still available on RaiPlay (https://www.raiplay.it/), but only from within Italy.

12 A trailer of the filmed version of *Sulle vie dell'inferno* and a full program of the 2021 festival are available at https://figlidartecuticchio.com/en/la-macchina-dei-sogni/edition-2021-sulle-vie-dellinferno/. A history of the Macchina dei Sogni festival with a description of its forty editions (1984-2024) can be found at https://figlidartecuticchio.com/en/la-macchina-dei-sogni/.

Figure 5 Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli performing *Bradamante e Fiordispina*, International Family Equality Day, Catania, May 5, 2024.

5. Special Groups

It also came to my attention, after my trip to Sicily, that puppet theater companies were performing for audiences beyond the ones that I describe above. On May 5, 2024, the Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli staged an open-air performance in Catania for International Family Equality Day (Figure 5), organized by Famiglie Arcobaleno Associazione Genitori Omosessuali. The play, titled *Bradamante e Fiordispina*, was based on an episode originating in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* in which the maiden Fiordispina desires the female knight Bradamante whom she believes to be a male knight. Ariosto further complicates the plot in the *Orlando Furioso* by imagining that the knight Ricciardetto becomes Fiordispina's lover by pretending to be his twin sister Bradamante who has magically undergone a sex change. The short play, written by Alessandro and Fiorenzo Napoli, adapts the Ariostean episode to support same-sex couples and their adopted children.

Additionally, in mid-May a friend sent me a newspaper article titled "The *Opera dei Pupi* accessible to the hearing impaired: now the paladins of Cuticchio express themselves in sign language."[13] As it turned out, Mimmo Cuticchio was performing as a *cuntista* (storyteller) rather than a puppeteer, but the episode, that of Orlando's heroic death in the battle of Roncevaux, happened to be the climactic event of the entire Paladins of France cycle in Sicilian puppet theater. This initiative brought Cuticchio onstage with the deaf actor Giuseppe Giuranna, who used Vernacular Visual and sign language under the direction of Giusi Cataldo. The May 17, 2024, performance was filmed and shown at Palazzo Branciforte throughout June.[14]

6. Beyond Palermo and Catania

Although I was only able to visit Palermo and Catania on my most recent trip to Sicily, there are puppet theaters in other cities as well. Indeed, this year's edition of the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette's Festival di Morgana (November 2024) included *Opera dei Pupi* plays in Acireale, Alcamo, Carini, Cinisi, Messina, Paternò, Siracusa, and Sortino.[15] Limited space permits the mention of only a few of the puppeteers who caught my attention in the past and who continue to perform today.

Siracusa has a tradition of puppets with papier mâché faces initiated by Alfredo Vaccaro, the grandfather of Alfredo and Daniel Mauceri. The brothers, who were performing together when I attended their shows in the early 2000s, have had separate puppet theaters since 2020. When I asked Alfredo how the COVID-19 restrictions had affected him, he explained, "that long pause gave us the opportunity to regenerate and we began to rebuild everything, to imagine new shows and new ways of staging." This included the Sicilian-set *Cavalleria Rusticana* and a new version of Angelica's arrival in Paris. "Free from the constraints of the past," he continued, "I was able to give space to the word, expanding the shows and reworking every single script from the past by adding parts omitted at the time or adding new parts. Ample space for literary and visual creativity, creating costumes that go beyond traditional canons, giving a decidedly more 'high fashion' edge. [...] Pure theatre, so much so that I no longer define it 'puppet theater' but 'theater with puppets.'"

Lampedusa is predominantly in the news today as a prime destination of boats that illegally transport African migrants desperately in search of a better life in Europe. Yet the island is famous in puppet theater history as the site of a battle that put an end to Agramante of Biserta's invasion of France (a war begun in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* and concluded in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*). Lampedusa is also home to the *cuntista* (storyteller) and puppeteer Giacomo Sferlazzo, who stages the narrative of that epic battle for both tourists and residents. On September 15, 2024, Sferlazzo's Compagnia Brandimarte joined forces with the companies of Enzo Mancuso and the Fratelli Napoli to bring *L'ariostesca sfida di tre contro tre a Lampedusa* to the public on three adjacent stages, performing in both alternating and, at times, simultaneous fashion.

The event evoked the historical 1978 performance on the island in which the Fratelli Napoli and the Mancuso family also participated together with additional companies. Not having access to the earlier initiative, I would venture to guess that certain features of this year's performance were purposefully adapted to the present moment,

13 The original title is "L'opera dei pupi accessibile ai sordomuti: ora i paladini di Cuticchio si esprimono nella lingua dei segni."

14 Clips from the performance are found on the video, "Palermo. Il 'cunto' di Cuticchio in LIS a palazzo Branciforte."

15 The program can be found at https://www.museodellemarionette.it/en/2014-07-05-07-57-08/festival-di-morgana.

in particular, the puppeteers' denunciation of aggressive warfare and their plea for a peaceful co-existence among people of different religious creeds. Early in the play, the demon Asmodeo presented a disenchanted view of the upcoming conflict in his remarks to the fairy Melissa, noting that her subterfuge would place "more blood on the conscience of men and send more souls to Hell." The conclusion of the play was a discourse in which the Madonna of Lampedusa asked everyone (not only the characters portrayed by the puppets, but also the public and, by extension, the world) to remember that on that same island Christians and Muslims prayed together in front of her effigy. "Lay down your swords and lances under my cloak," she pleaded, "and embrace each other, my children, for you are all brothers and sisters. The Mediterranean is your home, Lampedusa a lighthouse in the night and I am the port of all sailors."[16]

Each in their own way, Sicilian puppeteers are refashioning their centuries-old tradition with the intention of creating viable and relevant modern theatrical productions. As Alfredo Mauceri recently remarked: "As a puppeteer I treat traditional material with a contemporary twist to make it a product of its times. I don't know if one day the puppets will hold lightsabers and wear luminescent clothes, that is not my aim, my aim is to make the puppets current in their content while remaining faithful to the past, continuing to explore the many stories told in chivalric poems, and it's strange that no one has thought of making a film adaptation because *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando Furioso* seem so ancient as to be contemporary."[17] And as Giacomo Cuticchio has succinctly stated, puppet theater "has always been a contemporary theater, always, even in the nineteenth century, when it reached its maximum splendor, it was a truly contemporary theater because the epic narrative that is staged in puppet theater is a pretext for interpreting the current period."[18] Puppeteers' awareness of the needs and interests of distinct audiences seems key to ensuring that *Opera dei Pupi* will live and even thrive far into the future. A

16 Further information about the event can be found on the "Battle of Lipadusa" page on eBOIARDO.

17 Personal email message to the author, June 3, 2024.

18 "Incontro con Giacomo Cuticchio."

Resources

As I follow Sicilian puppeteers on their creative journeys, I will continue to share materials and news on the eBOIARDO website: edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo/.

One can find information about the principal Sicilian puppet theater companies directly on their websites and/or Facebook pages:

Palermo

Mimmo Cuticchio's Associazione Figli d'Arte Cuticchio (Facebook page);

Enzo Mancuso's Teatro Carlo Magno, Figli d'Arte Mancuso (Facebook page);

Associazione culturale Franco Cuticchio Figlio d'Arte (Facebook page);

Salvatore Bumbello's Compagnia Opera dei pupi Brigliadoro (Facebook page);

Teatro dei Pupi Famiglia Argento (Facebook page);

The Antonio Pasqualino International Puppet Museum also has a stage where puppet theater companies have performed through the years. Currently, Salvatore Bumbello regularly performs there.

Catania

La Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli (Facebook page);

Siracusa

Alfredo Mauceri's La Compagnia dei Pupari Vaccaro-Mauceri (Facebook page)

Daniel Mauceri Arte Pupara (Facebook page)

Lampedusa

Giacomo Sferlazzo's Teatro Brandimarte (Facebook page)

Alcamo

Salvatore Oliveri's Compagnia Opera dei pupi siciliani Gaspare Canino (Facebook page)

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All Sporting Endeavor Aspires to the Condition of a Fight

On *Body* by Harry Crews

Sean Hooks

In 2012, Harry Crews died at seventy-six of complications from neuropathy, and any standard biography, drawing from Ted Geltner's 2016 *Blood, Bone, and Marrow: A Biography of Harry Crews*, will focus on Crews's upbringing in abject poverty in Bacon County, Georgia, his ascent out of polio and domestic abuse (from a stepfather), after losing his birth father when Crews was age two (as an adult, Crews would lose his own young son to a drowning), into a 30-year writing career. He befriended everyone from Sean Penn and Madonna to Charles Bronson and Robert Blake, garnering him a place in the twentieth-century canon of weird/off-kilter writing as well as a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

The son of tenant farmers who grew up staring at the stars through the roof of the shack which served as his bedroom, his childhood household notoriously contained only two books—the Bible and the Sears catalog, with Crews more inspired by the latter, inventing stories about the models and products therein. He served in the Marines, taught himself the literary greats from the base library, and averred that this saved him from a life in prison. A sports fanatic and natural athlete who possessed an ornery and hard-bitten aesthetic—he quite enjoyed being seen as the kind of guy who makes the security guard move their hand toward their weapon whenever Crews entered a bank—he bore on his arm a much-lionized tattoo of e.e. cummings's line "how do you like your blue-eyed boy Mister Death."

All of this informs the 1990 novel *Body*, and well into his sixties Crews maintained his own body, running and lifting weights daily while dating a former regional bodybuilding champion named Maggie Powell. After the military, Crews studied at the University of Florida on the G.I. Bill under the tutelage of Agrarian writer Andrew Lytle, founder of the creative writing program at UF, who was simpatico with Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate.

Aside from blowing paychecks at local gin mills (on plentiful drugs, booze, and women), Crews could be both abjectly cantankerous or overwhelmingly affable to the townies in Gainesville. He was beloved around the scene's dive bars and adored by his creative writing students, of whom literary fictioneer Kevin Canty and bestselling mystery writer Michael Connelly are the best known. Industrious, straightforward, and a declarative dispenser of advice about the writing life, Crews rejected the oft-affixed label of "Southern gothic" (and all labels other than "writer").

Crews, whose archives are housed at the University of Georgia at Athens, was part of the New Journalism era, and published columns for *Esquire* and *Playboy*. He's known for a string of novels and his memoir *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place* (1978). Upon its 2022

reissue as a Penguin Classic, Casey Cep in *The New Yorker* called *A Childhood* "one of the finest memoirs ever written," a book that "animates nostalgia and then annihilates it." *The Hawk is Dying* (1973), *The Gypsy's Curse* (1974), *A Feast of Snakes* (1976), *Florida Frenzy* (1982), *Scar Lover* (1992)—the titles point effortlessly at Crews's niche—and his debut *The Gospel Singer* (1968) all maintain varying levels of renown.

In a March 15, 2022 piece in the *Los Angeles Times,* Lauren Leblanc describes Crews as a provocateur "who inspired a diverse generation," a bridge between Southern writers past and present, and a "problematic white, male Southern writer" due to affairs with students in his private life and his uses of racially insensitive language in his public fiction, though both the behavior and the argot were very much of their time, and some authors today still refuse to self-censor, tone down, or appease. Richard Howorth, of Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi, calls Crews "distinctly Southern" and "unquestionably unaffected, genuine. There was no one like him." LeBlanc also writes that "there is nothing folksy, never mind pastoral or genteel, about Crews." His writing is caustic, uncanny, his unspooling literary mind that of an unsentimental outlaw. The contemporary genre-smashing African-American noir author S.A. Cosby sees Crews's great contribution in how he went beyond the gothic narratives of Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor to depict a nightmarish grotesque, an anti-pastoralist view of the South and of America. This take elevates Crews well beyond the "dead white male" denotation/denigration. He was a libertine, not a misogynist, and his legacy is also complemented (and complimented) by acolytes Kim Gordon, Lydia Lunch, and Maud Newton—the last his former student and a leftist voice of high acumen both in her former guise as a first-generation book blogger and now as a nonfiction chronicler in *Ancestor Trouble* (2022). Newton sees Crews's legacy as linked to his heroes, O'Connor and Eudora Welty, whereas Lunch, the great feminist post-Beat east-coast poet, and Gordon, the great feminist west-coast indie rock frontwoman once combined with drummer Sadie Mae for a punk band named: Harry Crews.

Dwight Garner finds the comic and the bizarre in Crews, tying him together with Barry Hannah and Larry Brown as "part of a Southern writers' movement that centered dissidents and outsiders." Garner sees posterity in their "misfit wisdom" and positions these "rough south" fellows alongside their sistren Bobbie Ann Mason and Jayne Anne Phillips within a micro-genre called "grit lit," which implies inclusion with the K-Mart realism of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Robert Stone, Tim O'Brien, Douglas Unger, Joy Williams, and Tobias Woolf.

In *Body*, Crews's protagonist's "deadname" of Dorothy reads like a direct allusion to the American South literary legend Dorothy Allison. Crews's other works might be better known, but it is in *Body* that he leans most into the role of not just status quo–violator but miner, toiling in the dark and sweaty recesses of the caverns of the human while maintaining a glittering humor, a most sardonic smirk at the American consumerist swamp. David Haward Bain, editor of *Whose Woods These Are: A History of the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, 1926-1992* (1993), encapsulates Crews's charisma: "his close-cropped hair, squinty eyes, razor-trimmed muttonchop sideburns, and infectious and flamboyant manner, developed an instant following." His attitude towards teaching was often summed up as: Every lecture a performance. And performance is at the heart of *Body*'s documentation of the rise of the bodybuilding movement.

For all the literary credibility of the aforementioned comparisons and bonafides, none of Crews's cohort (not even Norman Mailer, who thought of Crews as beginning "where James Dickey left off") wrote a racially combustible, gender-detonating, class-centered

Body's determined effort to empathize with the downtrodden—to expose, explore, and explain the deprivations and excesses of American ambition—is unarbitrated, unvarnished, unflinching, and inimitable.

but never proletarian-preachy novel set at a women's bodybuilding competition in Miami at the end of the 1980s. *Body* is a work that levitates out of Crews's bibliography as particularly modern.

Its transcending of gender, racial, and class politics, its ahead-of-its-time trans narratives, its renegade repurposing of sports narratives and drug narratives, its edifications and non-reifications of "the dirty South" and its extremes, in an America perpending the decline of the Soviet bloc, all roil together in a transgressive and subversive mode that merges with that of the era's iconoclastic titans: Bret Easton Ellis, Kathy Acker, Dennis Cooper, Gary Indiana, Wayne Koestenbaum, A.M. Homes, Irvine Welsh, and Michel Houellebecq. Maud Newton writes in her 2012 elegy from *The Awl*: "In his fiction and in his life, Harry Crews empathized most with the people who needed it most: the freaks, the fuck-ups, people who'd been broken by loss of one kind or another." *Body* may read as outlandish or politically incorrect in the mid-2020s, but its determined effort to empathize with the downtrodden—to expose, explore, and explain the deprivations and excesses of American ambition— is unarbitrated, unvarnished, unflinching, and inimitable; unlikely even from an independent publisher in today's safe-at-all-costs literary economy.

The most prescient aspect of *Body* is its fascination with self-invention. Its world of bodybuilding and gym obsessives is full of post-Reaganites and proto-Rogan listeners, deep in the blue collar "have-nots" landscape, but with some of the white collar "haves" already aspiring to Silicon Valley, South Beach, and corporate Vegas glitz, the "I'll live forever and stay young and good looking 'til the end"sters who think supplements, cold plunges, and unironic mustaches will carve a path to their own deification and immortality.

Within this setting, we're still a couple of years before *The Real World* and RuPaul, before *The Crying Game* winning awards and Kurt Cobain donning dresses, and before the arrival of other pop-culture entities that would collapse binaries and unlock new frontiers of weirdness while mainstreaming the underground. Crews hones in on the fear of dying unknown; a pre-smartphone, pre-internet herald of Andy Warhol's "fifteen minutes of fame" gone meta (and Meta). The enlightened reality-makers and deluded reality-deniers of *Body* constitute its cast of characters: Caucasian protagonist Shereel Dupont (nee Dorothy Turnipseed), competing to win the title of Ms. Cosmos, her coach Russell "Muscle" Morgan, her Black opponent and that opponent's Black coach, Marvella Washington and Wallace "The Wall" Wilson, and our protagonist's white trash family with their fear of cultural change and a "make American great again" worldview long before the rise of that northerner Donald Trump, whom Crews met personally and who's much referenced in *Body*.

Real-life Trump, then in his Atlantic City hotelier and casino-operator phase, escorted Crews to his front-row seat alongside Madonna and Sean Penn for the Mike Tyson-Michael Spinks bout in 1988, and *Body* embodies the fight, the war, the contentiousness that is our current-day (and eternal) currency. "Few writers are so

relentlessly concerned with the physical rather than the intellectual," John L. Williams argues in *3:AM Magazine*. The blackest of comedies, *Body* is grim at times, hilariously unfiltered at others, ecstatic and anything but congenial.

By the late eighties, we'd had the rise of Arnold Schwarzenegger and *Pumping Iron* (1977), the subculture of Mr. Olympia competitions and their ilk, a period documented in George Gallo's *Bigger*, the 2018 movie about Joe Weider and his brothers founding the International Foundation of Bodybuilders and launching the gym movement as much as Jane Fonda did. Readers may also conjure up 2024's *Love Lies Bleeding*, a 1989-set LGBT crime-romance directed by Rose Glass starring Kristen Stewart as a woman in love with an aspiring female bodybuilder, 2023's *Magazine Dreams* from Elijah Bynum and starring Jonathan Majors as a Black man navigating the world of bodybuilding celebrity, or even *Rocky IV* (1985), where Russia provides the antagonist via Dolph Lundgren as Ivan Drago, signaled as evil because he uses steroids.

Crews wasn't a mainstream filmmaker repositioning the Cold War, nor a genre-postmodernist breaking down signified and signifier. He was a survivor who loved gladiatorship, boxing, and martial arts, as seen in his books *Karate is a Thing of the Spirit* (1971) and *The Knockout Artist* (1988). One of the few literary works that serve as a real antecedent to *Body* is Leonard Gardner's sole novel, the boxing classic *Fat City* (1969). By this point in his career, Crews was wearing a slightly ridiculous mohawk alongside his scars and grizzled countenance and, yes, still had an earned toughness that'd make anyone who'd glance twice extremely unlikely to call him out on it. But by the time he hit his mid-50s, he was closer to a traditional professor, no longer galivanting into days-long benders with hillbilly carnies or Alaskan pipeliners. Crews's spin on Walter Pater's quote, "All art aspires to the condition of music" is "All sporting endeavor aspires to the condition of a fight."

Body opens with a scene between coach and pupil. The comedic conceit has Russell "Muscle" Morgan literally screwing his prodigy Shereel DuPont in order to sweat her down under the weight limit for her class. He provides instruction, guidance, funds, and protection amidst quasi-criminal surroundings —cheats and scammers within and without the bodybuilding world—bringing to mind the numinous nature of the Southern mafia, redolent of songs by Jason Isbell and Drive-By Truckers, the noir-tinged novels of John Brandon, the film-worlds of Jeremy Saulnier, and the new-canon nonfiction of John Jeremiah Sullvan.

Immersing the reader in turn-of-the-nineties capitalism, *Body*'s men peacock and display value. They're often war veterans. Women are often secretaries, and Dorothy/Shereel is a secretary-turned-superstar. The tactile sensations of stardom invoke both the Warholian and, well, let's call it Dana White-ish, Vince McMahon-esque; the worlds of MMA and WWE are brewing here. As is the female combatant narrative, where films like Karyn Kusama's *Girlfight* (2000) and Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and novels like Erika Krouse's *Contenders* (2015) and Rita Bullwinkel's *Headshot* (2024) would burble forth in coming years.

Body's subtitle is "a tragicomedy." This term encompasses a lot in 2025—from the films of Alexander Payne to the novels of Jonathan Franzen to the TV program *The Bear*—but there are few middle or upper classers here, no northeastern, Californian, or midwestern cities. This is the humidity-drenched deep South, a realm of redneckery and constant racial and gender tensions, where Sean Baker's film *The Florida Project* (2017), and his trans-focused and sex-worker-humanizing filmography, bears mention as well.

Permeating *Body* there's an unremittent raucous quality that an author unfamiliar with poverty and Southern life would've mangled, but Crews grants his characters, however low

class and callous, dignity: these folks are every bit as worthy of both empathy and satire as anyone. It's a picaresque burlesque, downright slapstick at times, a manic energy pervasive.

"The dark" is omnipresent, though "dark humor," as it's used today, wasn't a widespread term at the turgid turn of the nineties. *Body*'s blurbs, however, provide a thrum of the dawning zeitgeist. The *Chicago Tribune* deems Crews "the resident storyteller of today's South," knighting him with a mix of the masculine and the feminine: "muscular, belligerent, but also touching." The *New York Times Book Review* calls him Swiftian, a comic moralist defined by ferocity and Wildean wit. And *The Philadelphia Inquirer* praises the author as colorful, unpredictable.

If the works of Larry McMurtry present a sort of dying South, Crews presents the insuppressible and unkillable zombie South, complete with a jawbone full of chaw, spitting tobacco juice and the n-word with equal disdain, enemy of Yankee northernness, enforced "progress," or really any externally defined values at all, the land of "rebels" who never wanted your colonization and "education" to begin with, tetchy from being part of the American empire, a secessionist core to the superstructure that's contemptuous and unapologetic, repudiating the urbane and polished. At one point a Vietnam vet named Nail Head opines that it always comes down to the knife eventually, so why all the platitudes and fake politeness?

This is sometimes posited as the appeal of Donald Trump: the unapologetic swaggerer who exhorts others not to apologize, a throwback to a rougher, crueler, lie-filled but somehow more "honest" time of social-Darwinist excess. Trump receives his first mention in Chapter 9. The antagonist bodybuilder Marvella is a doper, and her lineage is contrasted with real-life bodybuilders Frank Zane, Lou Ferrigno, Lee Haney, and of course Arnold Schwarzenegger (a Trump predecessor in some ways). The time is one wherein the gender dynamics of women's bodybuilding were shifting away from the first-ever Ms. Olympia Rachel McLish—"she was muscular, and also perfectly symmetrical and coordinated, but most of all she could be put in a dress and taken home to mother. But in a short period of time following Rachel McLish's reign as world champion, if you put a world-class female bodybuilder in a dress, she could not be taken home to mother or many other places because they looked like men tricked out in women's clothing." There's even an explicit comment that the judges and fans of the sport are in the process of deciding "what the ideal woman ought to look like."

Marvella's African-American trainer predicts the POC Trump voter in lines like "He had decided it was the American way. Where was the American who owned anything that he did not wish was bigger? Wall's waking hours were haunted by Donald Trump, and his dreams were shot through with whole populations of Donald Trumps."

Crews's preternatural gift for the darkly comic and truly America-skewering runs deep in these Trump-alluding chapters where he sets up the novel's conflict: the "good" white bodybuilder who looks like a trad woman vs. the "bad" Black bodybuilder who looks like a trans-male. Marvella's an antagonist but not a villain. She's a victim of the patriarchy too. Wall constantly talks about how he trains Marvella like a horse and owns her like a slave, claiming to own her sisters as well, "the way Jesus owned the disciples." Wall, Marvella, and her sisters hail from Detroit, and the sisters are named Starvella, Shavella, Jabella, and Vanella; the last "the lightest-skinned by far, and the most beautiful," in a vicious satire of colorism. Wall repeatedly claims ownership over women, but what owns him? The quest for Trump and company's atavistic "great"ness, fame and fortune, the American dream. He and Marvella's motto? "Greatness or death." The abiding corporeal awareness in *Body* manifests in forms both hilarious and searing.

As *Body* turns towards its climax, the explicit coach-athlete relationship is given uneasy airing when Shereel responds to her trainer Russell's exhortations that "I'm the one who trained you…I'm the one who got you here," with, "You swung the whip. I'm the one who hurt and sweated blood."

Crews really cooks up the Great (Southern) American Novel here, putting everything into it—all the people and history and concepts. When Don DeLillo or Thomas Pynchon does this, it's called a "systems novel," while writers like Crews are often regionalized or minimized by a literary community unlikely to grant him the accolades hurled at writers like DeLillo or Pynchon. Not that these authors are in any way undeserving, but they have far fewer scenes like one where Russell looks at Shereel's foil Marvella with "asexual admiration. He would no more have thought of fucking her than he would have thought of fucking a statue of General Lee in a public park." The faint of heart might lament the directness of Crews's language, but I dare them to find me in American literature a macho "alpha-male" comparing the perfect form of a Black female athlete to a statue of the most infamous internal antagonist in US history or the audacity and perspicacity to compare Sheree's family hooting and hollering at the contestants' flexing and crabbing to the roars of adulation that once attended American lynchings.

Crews also tilts at 1980s "gym culture" as inception point, a sort of Dylanesque idea that, "Life isn't about finding yourself…it's about creating yourself." *Body* is also published within the timeframe just before Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) would comment on the commodification and feminization of the American male, and just after Warhol's superstars and drag queens were reconstructing the gender paradigm in the AIDS-era New York City documented in the artworks and literature of David Wojnarowicz. The deep-South settings of Crews's work, far from Armistead Maupin's or Susan Sontag's interrogations of the queering of the culture, were mostly precluded from such discourse at the time. And the bodybuilders in Crews's novel—preening and posing, with fake-tanned skin and shaved-down smoothness—model the identity replication done nowadays online, the dermabrasion that is one's e-dentity on social media or dating websites.

Russell Muscle's an OG bodybuilder. He trains women but doesn't think men should serve as judges for the female division and nostalgizes his field: "The whole sport had changed up on him. When he started, there had been no women and no she-men, or none that he knew of." This newness he's faced with reminds of nothing so much as the ardent Trump supporter, a MAGA revanchism that unfurls in some of Crews's best prose in the book: "It made him feel weird," is his description of Russell's purview (and "weird" was a term much discussed in the leadup to the Trump-Harris presidential election, both parties wielding it to marginalize the other), "made him feel lost, the way he might feel if he went out one night and instead of walking into his own house, he made a wrong turn and walked into the house of a neighbor where everything was strange and where he did not belong."

In *The Southern Literary Journal*, Frank W. Shelton argues: "Crews's fiction centers on the

underlying tension between man's yearning for perfection, yet the inevitable imperfection of the world and life in it…manifested in the body, conflicts with his yearning for spiritual perfection. Crews evokes the traditional duality of body and spirit, the body representing the biological trap man finds himself in, which intensifies his yearning for spiritual sustenance…Crews treats physical rituals as manifestations of man's search for value. Looking at his novels…I contended that 'the hope they offer has been gradually reduced, that the sustaining role ritual can play has diminished, and that the arena in which man can constructively act has become narrower and narrower until it virtually disappears.'" *Body*'s conclusion will support Shelton's nihilistic reading.

As *Body* turns towards its climax, the explicit coach-athlete relationship is given uneasy airing when Shereel responds to her trainer Russell's exhortations that "I'm the one who trained you…I'm the one who got you here," with, "You swung the whip. I'm the one who hurt and sweated blood." This parallels the dray horse verbiage that Wall hurls at Marvella and evokes the virulence of both slavery and animal abuse. The taskmaster pose of the older mentor sexually entangled with his charge calls the reader's mind to both the #MeToo movement and to "tiger moms" and the overambitious coaches and parents living vicariously through their children's academic, artistic, and athletic achievements, a worldwide phenomenon that crosses cultural, ethnic, and class boundaries.

Russell tells Shereel, "there are posters of you plastered on walls all over this country and half of Europe," that she's the result of their shared ambition, and that victory will make her a "somebody…the very best of her kind…special in a way very few people are ever privileged to know." If this isn't the Olympics and the Oscars, child beauty pageants and gameshow contestants, Instagrammers and TikTok aspirants, I don't know what is. The blurbs call Crews "Swiftian," but his approach is less clinical and poetic than Swift's, his American ironist's approach more a mashup of Mark Twain and Larry Flynt. *Body* furnishes all our masquerade, maquillage, and armor, a novel peopled by beleaguered souls (much like the bifurcated political parties in the mid-2020s) desperate to outdo each other, to have their worldview triumph at any cost.

We get another ripping Trump aside as, before weigh-in, Wallace sleeps in the same room with Marvella and her sisters, a "long desperate night holding his hard cock and listening to pussy snoring all around him while he dreamed on and off of Donald Trump. Not really Donald Trump exactly, but rather the way he acquired things. *Acquisitions*. Wallace had learned the word some time back, at about the same time he became fascinated with Trump." The root word of "fascinate" means "to paralyze," and Wallace is a Black character who has become fascinated, charmed, who considers himself a patriot, as did Trump's increased minority voting bloc in 2024. Wallace imagines "franchised Black Magic gyms all over the country," endorsements and strength supplements "sold in gymnasiums and health stores," and even "a line of clothing, both for the street and for the gym, and shoes." Not yet two years after the first Spike Lee/Michael Jordan Nike commercial, in the nascent days of "streetwear" before it rose to high fashion, Wall dreams of "Mercedes, Oriental rugs, European hotels, a personal cook, a personal pilot," and Trump's yacht with phones "for nearly every foot his yacht measured in length."

The final chapter proffers the showdown. Shereel and Marvella arrive, eye each other and smile, balancing in each other's gaze. Her father Fonse, who's never seen her compete, is shocked by her transformation. "You can't git to look like that by accident," he states. "She did it to herself. She made herself into somethin' else." And while it's easy to read this as a literal patriarch offended by his grown-woman daughter making a strange/

weird/feminist choice that rails against traditional definitions of "womanhood," his response mellows and he asks after his wife, who's found her way to their seats, and his sons remind him that Ernestine didn't want to see the backstage prejudgment up close. "By God, she was right," Fonse muses aloud, a know-nothing wishing he hadn't been stripped of his illusions.

Crews paces his novel well, tunnels into his female protagonist's interiority, her single-minded purpose, her attitude that second place is no place, inconceivable. The novel ends more tragically than comically, and violence erupts in ways I'll leave unspoiled.

This novel, bellicose and nihilistic both, is Crews's satirical attempt at redemptive justice, an inversion of all the ugly racial history, the most carceral and murderous abuses of power, the corrupt and racist decisions handed down by (almost always white male) cops and judges over the long and burdened history of both Southern region and American nation. This level of sublimated anger turned sublime tragicomedy has few practitioners. David Lynch's oeuvre contends with whiteness, violence, and American rot, often focusing on the disfigured. James Hannaham's PEN/Faulkner-winning *Delicious Foods* (2014) is written in a jagged Southern vernacular, a ribald novel as ominous as the Kara Walker silhouettes which bedeck its cover art, an allegory full of gruesome disfigurement about how humans never cease trying to own and exploit each other, often under racial rubrics, a book that excoriates slavery and trafficking not just in the past but in the present.

Two other works offering a Crews-ian rage-humor cocktail are Mat Johnson's graphic novel *Incognegro* (2008) and Percival Everett's novel *The Trees* (2021). Both obsess over that very Southern grotesquerie, the legacy of lynching, in fine and funny fables that unpack the necessarily virulent imagery of cruelty, degradation, and disfiguration. In league with Lynch and this trio of contemporary African-American authors, Crews's articulations on the myriad deformities of body and life wrought by the American cauldron of objectification and the Southern still of dehumanization look straight ahead and unblinking at the carcasses, the bodies, the strange fruit scattered through region and country alike. A

Understanding The Senex

The Figure of the Older Human Being

Frederick Turner, Tina Chen, Roger Malina, and Robert Stern

1. What is Senex?

Many academic disciples recognize aging, senescence, geriatrics, "the elderly," or "seniors," as important subjects. Gerontology is a recognized discipline that, in its own terms:

> *combines or integrates several separate areas of study. The Gerontological Society of America fosters interdisciplinary collaboration between physicians, nurses, biologists, behavioral and social scientists, psychologists, social workers, economists, policy experts, those who study the humanities and the arts, and many other scholars and researchers in aging. Geriatrics, the branch of medical science concerned with the prevention and treatment of diseases in older people, is a part of the broader field of gerontology.*[1]

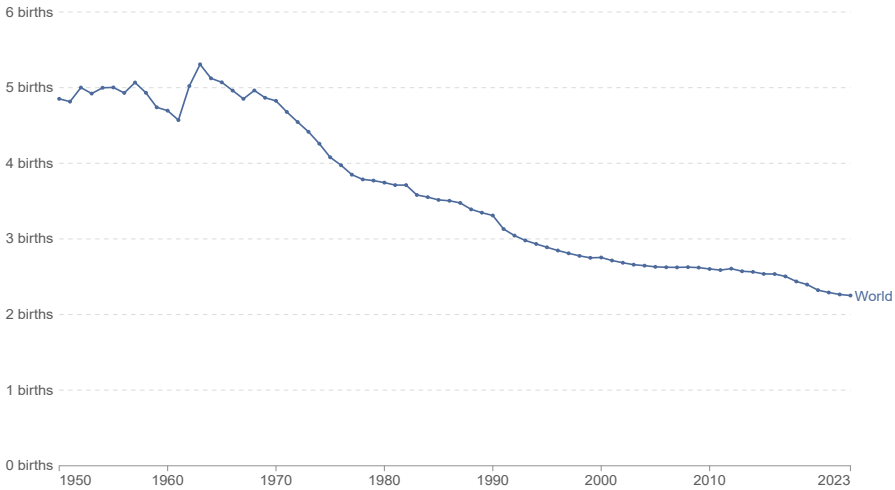
Our interest in this essay is to focus on the figure of the older human being, what we call the Senex, which seems to be an archetype in all human cultures and historical periods. Our approach is emergentist, that is, it is interested in phenomena whose wholes are greater than the sum of their parts, whose origin is autopoietic and whose continued existence is self-maintaining. We are less interested in fixing what goes wrong with young people when they age, than in what grows and deepens in people more than 65 years old. While the disciplines listed in the Gerontological Society of America's mission statement above use various versions of the analytical and reductive methods of normal science and scholarship, we offer a more synthesizing and holistic perspective on the issues surrounding the Senex. That perspective includes a historical glance at the issue itself and chooses as collaborators a group of poets from two great culture areas past and present, poets who have deeply understood the individual and collective nature of the aging process.

We chose the term "Senex" (Latin, "old person") for its rich body of implications and linguistic adaptations in many European languages and over more than two millennia. A deep paradox stands out in the meanings of the root "sen." Is the senior senile? Is the sire senescent? Is the seigneur a victim of senility? Is seniority the sign of authority, responsibility, care, and protection, or of oppression, irresponsibility, indifference, and exploitation? If both, why? Does the nature of senescence play a role in the difference between benevolent and malevolent Senexes? And what ideas might be of value in realizing the better implications rather than the worse, given that the Senex is not going away, and is becoming dominant in numbers?

1 From the mission statement of the Gerontological Society of America https://www.geron.org/About-GSA

Fertility rate: births per woman

The total fertility rate[1] summarizes the total number of births a woman would have, if she experienced the birth rates seen in women of each age group in one particular year across her childbearing years.



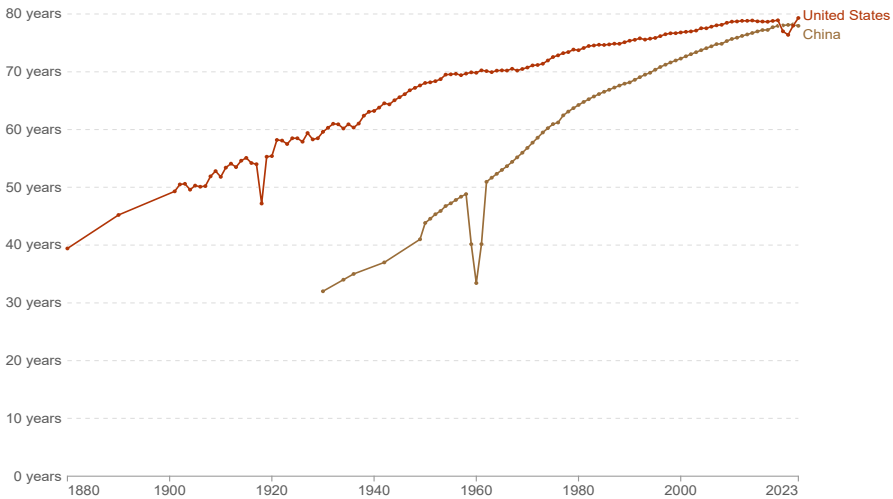
Data source: UN, World Population Prospects (2024) OurWorldinData.org/fertility-rate | CC BY

Fertility rate: The total fertility rate is a period metric; it summarizes data from one particular year. For a given year, the total fertility rate represents the total number of children born to a hypothetical woman on average, if she (1) lived to the end of her childbearing years, and (2) experienced the same age-specific fertility rates throughout her whole reproductive life as the age-specific fertility rates seen in that particular year. I is different from the average number of children born to women that eventually have across their childbearing years, which is the cohort fertility rate.

Source: https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/children-per-woman-un?tab=line

Life expectancy

The period life expectancy[1] at birth, in a given year.



Data source: UN WPP (2024); HMD (2024); Zijdeman et al. (2015); Riley (2005) OurWorldinData.org/life-expectancy | CC BY

Period life expectancy: Period life expectancy is a metric that summarizes death rates across all age groups in one particular year. For a given year, it represents the average lifespan for a hypothetical group of people, if they experienced the same age-specific death rates throughout their whole lives as the age-specific death rates seen in that particular year.

Source: https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy

2. Why is the Senex Important Now?

The issue of the value of the Senex is a complex one. But to put it simply: Are old people to be loved for their wisdom, as a large part of the memory of human society, an essential repository of the past? Or are they an obsolescent burden on the middle-aged who are maintaining the present and the young who are creating the future?

Differences between the powerful and the powerless, between the rich and the poor, between one race and another, between the sexes, and between one religion and another have been made the basis of many persuasive and passionate theories of human history. But the differing motivations, abilities and social roles of different age-cohorts have received much less attention, partly because partisanship on one side or the other is a two-edged sword: the old are loyal to their own youth, and the young know that one day they will be old.

In rapidly changing societies, whether western or eastern, entirely new kinds of society emerged almost everywhere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where the young hugely multiplied and were greatly empowered, and the old often became useless relics. Tradition and experience could not compete with energy and innovation.

But now an even newer and stranger kind of society is emerging, north and south, east and west, in which human fecundity is falling as a result of economic and educational progress. The young are becoming a minority, and healthy longevity has doubled, while the pace of change has become so fast that experience is counted as less than a premium. The word wisdom, normally associated with old people, is evaporating from our vocabulary. Will we move to a world where the young are an elite minority? Or are the problems involved in progress itself of such a kind that energetic youth cannot solve, and only the broad, deep knowledge and patient wisdom of the old can remedy? And what is the proper balance between keeping the old in positions of importance and moving them aside in favor of young people?[2]

There are many questions that need to be addressed as we consider this problem and opportunity. Does not longevity combined with economic compound interest in a vital progressing economy automatically privilege many of the old, who have invested longer?[3] But doesn't rapid progress render obsolete the knowledge of the old who know more (at least until their brains decline)? What is the best way to ensure that the best old minds remain relevant, and to honor declining minds? Can knowledge become obsolete, and if so, does it retain any value as illuminative analogies to help resolve new problems, hints about fertile lines of exploration, or warnings about the consequences of certain kinds of mistakes? Those who do not know history, it is said, are doomed to repeat it. An increasingly aged society might be less subject to that trap, having lived through more of history—if its Senexes' memories are paid proper attention. What new values will emerge in such a society?

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2 This tension is felt very keenly in universities like UT Dallas, including by three of us who happen to be old.

3 The familiar social equity/class critique narrative is not the point of the essay, which is interested in a different kind of cross section of the population. And it assumes that the current unprecedented economic transformation of the planet will continue, resulting in the same kind of equalization of life expectancies across the globe that the second graph shows, where China has now pulled even with the US.

3. The Idea of Life-Stages

We think it is useful to look at some thoughts from the past about how our lives fall into "ages" and stages. These are interesting, because they were expressed at times when lives were much shorter and more difficult than they are today. One of the most fertile and commonly-cited passages in the West—and now increasingly across the world—is the famous speech of the melancholic Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

> *All the world's a stage,*
> *And all the men and women merely players;*
> *They have their exits and their entrances,*
> *And one man in his time plays many parts,*
> *His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,*
> *Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;*
> *And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel*
> *And shining morning face, creeping like snail*
> *Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,*
> *Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad*
> *Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,*
> *Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,*
> *Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,*
> *Seeking the bubble reputation*
> *Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,*
> *In fair round belly with good capon lined,*
> *With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,*
> *Full of wise saws and modern instances;*
> *And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts*
> *Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,*
> *With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;*
> *His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide*
> *For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,*
> *Turning again toward childish treble, pipes*
> *And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,*
> *That ends this strange eventful history,*
> *Is second childishness and mere oblivion,*
> *Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste,*
> *sans everything.*

As we shall see, the concept of life stages, age grades, or age sets is not unusual; indeed for anthropologists it is a standard feature of most, if not all, known human societies.[4] Shakespeare was not original in noticing this feature of human nature. But Shakespeare is both original and memorable—and indeed profound—in emphasizing the other meaning of "stage": that is, the theatrical space where a performance is rehearsed and played. The fellow in Jaques' half-satiric, half-tragic account is playing a part in each stage. We humans are not just dragged by our genes and bodies into certain patterns of behavior. We choose them, acting out our parts graphically by word, action, dress, and behavior.

We find a similar theme in Walter Raleigh's poem on the life stages, written in 1612 while awaiting his execution:

> *What is our life? A play of passion,*
> *Our mirth the music of division.*
> *Our mothers' wombs the tiring houses be*
> *Where we are dressed for this short comedy.*
> *Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is*
> *That sits and marks still who doth act amiss.*
> *Our graves that hide us from the searching sun*
> *Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.*
> *Thus march we playing to our latest rest,*
> *Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.*

Not long after Shakespeare's time Cornelis Saftleven, the Dutch painter, graphically represented the idea with its comic and tragic implications. We get control over our ridiculous biological transformations by representing them; the self that observes with a smile is not the doomed animal that serves it. This insight is a special feature of Shakespeare's

4 https://www.britannica.com/topic/age-set. For a thorough discussion of human cultural universals, see Donald Brown: *Cultural Universals*. McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages; 1st edition (January 1, 1991)

Cornelis Saftleven (Dutch, 1607-1681), *The Ages of Man*.
Creative Commons / Wikimedia

late-renaissance world, from his contemporaries Cervantes and Montaigne to Descartes and the great Rembrandt.

One of the oddities of human nature, much marked by anthropologists, is what they call *performativity*. We are not content to be something: we want to play it too, and play it up, play it to the hilt. We do not just get born and mate and die; we have baptisms, marriages, funerals, elaborately staged and rehearsed. Paradoxically, it is a way to assert our agency and freedom and dignity in the face of the necessary compulsions and constraints of a physical mortal animal. Like *stage*, almost all our words for really and intentionally doing something are also words for *not* really doing something, but pretending to: the *scene of a crime* is a real place, but to *make a scene* implies insincerity; to *act* is both to do something and to not do something, be just *acting*. Things *play out* by the natural forces of play in the system, but playacting is quite different. Our very word for a human agent is *person*: the word comes from the Latin term for a theatrical mask.

So the Senex is a part we humans play if we are lucky enough to reach it. It is by no means confined to one sex; it is not just wizard but witch. The archetype includes the Crone, the wise and subtle and dangerous figure of mysterious wisdom. The Crone was to appear in Shakespeare's later plays in two different guises: Queen Cleopatra and Hermione, the wise counsellor who guides King Leontes through his long penance for killing his wife, and brings her back to life at the end.

4. Poetry as a Window into the Senex in Other Cultures

The "stages of life" metaphor is not confined to the West. Other cultures share the concept. In the Hindu tradition, for instance, an appropriate acceptance of the roles of the life cycle, the Ashrama, is the path to happiness and fulfillment in life, crowned by a liberation from the cycle of life and death in Moksha, the state of freedom and enlightenment. The ashrama has four stages (not seven, though the principle is the same): the student, the householder, the hermit, and at last the sanyasi or enlightened one.

Rites of passage often celebrate the transitions from one stage to another: "first haircut" rituals, puberty rituals celebrating the first menses, boys' circumcision rituals, marriage, inheritance, etc.[5] Always there is a linkage between natural biological transitions and cultural models that require active "playing out."

What are the roles, and what are the issues and problems, of the last life-stage that is the subject of our investigation, the Senex? Let us look more closely at the poetry of another major culture, that of China, to get a sense of the spiritual, cultural and political issues surrounding the role of the aged sage. Confucius (551-479 BCE) is the paragon of such a figure.

As we might expect, Confucian literature emphasizes the importance of different stages in life, each with its own set of responsibilities and moral duties. For instance, the *Analects* of Confucius discuss the progression of learning and self-cultivation throughout a person's life.

子曰：「吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

Confucius said: "At fifteen, I applied myself to learning. At thirty, I stood on my own two feet. At forty, I had no more doubts. At fifty, I understood the will of heaven. At sixty my ear was attuned. At seventy, I followed all my heart's desires without overstepping the line."

Daoist literature often discusses the natural cycles of life and the importance of living in harmony with these cycles. Texts like the *Dao De Jing* (or *Tao Te Ching*) by Laozi emphasize the flow of life and the transformations that occur as part of the natural order. The text focuses on the natural order, the Dao (or Tao, the way), and living in harmony with it. It emphasizes simplicity, humility, and the cyclical nature of life.

Laozi speaks of returning to the state of a child, which represents purity, simplicity, and being in harmony with the Dao. For example, Chapter 55 states, "He who has in himself abundantly the attributes (of the Dao) is like an infant." The principle of *wu wei* (无为) or effortless action, is a recurring theme. It encourages going with the flow of life rather than resisting it, much like accepting life's stages as they unfold. In chapter 2, "The sage acts by doing nothing (*wu wei*), and everything is in order." Let all things arise naturally without initiating them; act without adding one's own tendencies. One embraces impermanence and constant change in life and accepts life's transitions. Chapter 16 reflects: "Returning to one's roots is known as stillness. This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny. Returning to one's destiny is eternal." The text speaks to the wisdom that comes with age and experience. It values the insights gained over a lifetime. Chapter 15 describes the sages of maturity as "watchful, as if crossing a river in winter."

We are to live in harmony with the natural world and the Dao, which can be seen as aligning one's life stages with the natural order.

5 https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1571&context=sswa_facpubs

Chapter 8 compares the best way to live to water: "The supreme good is like water. Water gives life to the ten thousand things without striving with them."

The Dao De Jing does not explicitly divide life into specific ages or stages as Shakespeare does, but its teachings provide a framework for understanding and navigating the different phases of life with wisdom and grace. While Shakespeare's aging exemplar seizes enthusiastically upon the stereotypes of behavior for each stage and appropriates them, the Dao's sage consciously seeks to "go with the flow"; the focus is on deliberately living in accordance with the Dao, which encompasses all stages of life. Neither, though, depicts humans as simply the puppets or victims of their life-stages.

Tensions between the old and the young, inherent in the life stages, are certainly present in the Chinese literary tradition. Historically, the pendulum seems to have swung between periods when youthful energy and exploration were encouraged, and periods of conservative insistence on order and control. The itinerant scholars of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-481 BCE) fostered a vibrant intellectual climate known as the "hundred schools of thought contending," marking one of the most flourishing literary periods. But after Qin Shihuang (259-210 BCE) unified China, he implemented a centralized system of prefectures and counties and pursued a culturally autocratic policy, including burning books and persecuting Confucian scholars, which severely damaged the intellectual spirit of the time.

After the Han Dynasty (202 BC–9 AD, 25–220 AD), Confucianism nearly became the "state religion, establishing the principle that literature serves to convey the Tao" (文以载道). During the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-589), political turmoil and chaos ensued; Buddhism was introduced to China, Taoism revived, and metaphysical debate flourished. Literature began to diverge from orthodoxy, focusing more on individuals and their thoughts. However, the influence of Confucianism remained pervasive in intellectual circles, evident in Tang poetry and the prose of the "Eight Great Masters of the Tang (618-907) and Song Dynasties." Figures like the poet Li Bai and the writer Su Shi, heavily influenced by Taoist thought, embodied a carefree intellectual spirit but still operated within the Confucian framework.[6]

The Song Dynasty (920-1679) reinforced authoritarian control over society, further exacerbated by the oppressive political regimes of the Ming (1368-1636) and Qing (1636-1912) Dynasties, which stifled literary thought. The operas and novels that emerged from civil society largely centered on themes of emperors and generals, talented scholars and beautiful women, palace intrigues, and worldly grievances, consistently laced with sermons of feudal morality.

But through all these changes the role of the Senex remains, with its hallmarks of bodily frailty, mystical contemplation, wisdom, transcendence of earthly ambitions, and eccentricity. The old one is both laughed at and respected; and even loved, as this selection shows.

Indomitable Soul
Cao Cao (155 - 220)

The divine turtle, though long-lived,
Must also meet its end.
The soaring serpent rides the mist,
Yet to the dust shall descend.
An old steed rests in its stable,
But its ambition spans a thousand miles.
In twilight years, a hero bold
Will not change his indomitable soul.
Heaven alone does not decree
The length or brevity of our days.
Nourishment and joy's embrace
Can lead to a life of lasting grace.
Oh, how this thought fills me with cheer![7]

6 Xianzhi Lin, "Chinese Literature Calls for Spiritual Home Return," accessed July 15, 2024, https://njucml.nju.edu.cn/5b/1f/c22609a351007/page.htm.

7 Translation by Tina Chen.

Cao Cao's poem reflects on the themes of mortality, ambition, and the enduring human spirit. It emphasizes that while life may be finite, the aspirations and determination of individuals can persist, transcending the limitations imposed by nature.

In Response to Bai Juyi's Poem on Aging
Liu Yuxi (772-842)

Who doesn't worry about growing old?
Who shows pity once old age has arrived?
My body's thin, my belt is often loose,
My hair is sparse, my old hat sits askew.
To save my eyesight, books abandoned now,
Smoke acupuncture eases the hard years.
Experienced in affairs, and still adept,
Observing people, watching their river flow.
On careful thought, it all seems fortunate,
From now on, I'll be light and carefree.
Don't mark the dark of mulberry and elm,
For look, the evening glow still fills the sky.[8]

Below are seven more short Chinese poems that show how people between 1000 and 1300 years ago thought about old people.[9]

River Snow
Liu Zongyuan (773-819)

A thousand mountains: the last bird has flown,
Plenty of footpaths, but no human sign.
A boat, an old man in rush cape and cap,
In the cold river snow, fishing, alone.

I Stop By at an Old Friend's Farmhouse
Meng Haoran (689-740)

My old friend cooks a chicken millet stew,
He's asked me to his farm to share a meal.
A clump of green trees lines the village side,
Blue mountains slant above the city wall.

Flowers and a threshing floor outside
the window,
We drink, talk hemp and mulberries and all;
Wait till the Chong Yang festival: I'll come
In time for the chrysanthemums in Fall.

The Villa of Zhongnan
Wang Wei (701-761)

In middle age I came to love the Dao,
In old age dwell now under Mount Zhongnan.
The mood comes often to go out alone;
There's good only the empty self can know.

I walk beside the water to its bourn,
And there I sit and watch the rising clouds.
Sometimes I meet an old man in the woods:
We talk and laugh with no thought of return.

At Night Far From Home He Unburdens His Heart
Du Fu (712-770)

A light wind in the thin grass of the shore,
A boat at night, tall-masted and alone;
The stars hang over a vast open plain,
The moon swims in the mighty river's stream.

So, do my writings make a famous name?
This sick old officer should just resign.
Adrift, adrift, what kind of thing am I?
A lone white gull between the earth and sky.

My Guest Arrives
Du Fu (712-770)

To north and south of my small house
springs well up everywhere;
A flock of gulls is all you see,
each day they fill the air.

Except for you, my dearest sir,
the flowering path's unswept;
The wicker gate is open now,
closed though it's always kept.

No fancy flavors grace our board,
the market being far;
The wine in our poor home is but
leftovers in a jar;

What do you say, shall we invite
the old man from next door?
I'll call over the fence to him
to help us drink some more.

8 Translation by Tina Chen and Frederick Turner.

9 Translations by Deng Yongzhao and Frederick Turner.

On the River
Du Fu (712-770)

A homesick traveler upon the river,
Outmoded scholar between earth and sky,
A scrap of cloud adrift on the horizon,
A moon in an eternal night, am I.

But in the setting sun my heart's still ready;
Though Fall gales blow, my illness fades away;
We always find an old horse worth the keeping,
And strength and speed are not the reason why.

5. The cosmological revolution against the Senex

But what if the "players" of the life-stages refuse or deny their roles? What if they want to continue in their roles after their part is over, or grab a later role before its time? What if a cohort of one generation should covet the benefits or exploit the weaknesses of other life-stages and usurp those of another? What if the figures in Saftleven's painting or Jaques' soliloquy should turn upon each other in hostile competition? In our times, we are used to the political and personal exploitation of natural, cultural, social and economic differences such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, etc, to correct past injustices or for political or economic gain. What has received less attention, until recently, are generational differences. But great poets can help us understand the possible pathologies and tragedies inherent in different life stages.

Shakespeare's perhaps greatest play, *King Lear*, is also the most searing, thorough, and profound treatment of the social, political, psychological and moral problems between the old and the young. It focuses with fierce insight on this issue, and is essential in any treatment of the figure of the Senex.

In *Lear*, two old men find themselves faced with the transfer of power from one generation to another. King Lear is eighty, and decides to abdicate the throne and divide his realm among his three daughters. He asks each one to say how much she loves him. In his folly, Lear believes the flattering lies of his two elder daughters and rejects the honesty of his loving Cordelia, the youngest, whom he disinherits. The elder daughters, Regan and Goneril, now in power, expel him from his former palace, and reduce him to a mad beggar wandering about in the storm without a roof over his head. But he is saved by Cordelia, who becomes for many lovers of Shakespeare's plays the archetype of loving care.

Lear's friend, the Duke of Gloucester, believes the lies of his bastard elder son Edmund, rather than the devotion of his younger legitimate son Edgar. Edmund's forged letter from his brother to himself is perhaps the most frank and brutal statement of the case:

> *This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should have half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother…*

In the folly of paranoid old age, Gloucester is horrified, and blames cosmic events for what he falsely believes is his betrayal by his loyal and loving son Edgar.

> *These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction: there's son against father. The King falls from bias of nature:*

there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.

Though the play is set in an ancient era of English history, here Shakespeare refers directly to great changes of his own times in humanity's understanding of its place in the universe. And he links them to the horrific evils of the play: Gloucester is betrayed by his evil son as a traitor, has his eyes gouged out, but is rescued by his good son and dies in his arms. *King Lear* is about a massive change in ethical and political perspectives, which was going on in Shakespeare's own time, a change sometimes referred to as the waning of the medieval world, sometimes as the Renaissance. Will youth just crush age, or preserve it?

Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* in 1606. Five years later, John Donne, who probably knew Shakespeare, took up the theme:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out,
The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,
All just supply, and all relation;
Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a phoenix, and that then can be
None of that kind, of which he is, but he.

Both great poets sensed that something had terribly changed, and that the change had also changed the relations between human beings—between "prince and subject" and "father and son," senior and junior. Individualism trumps Christian charity. Two years later, in 1613, the first copies of Machiavelli's *The Prince* began to circulate in Europe: it explicitly replaced the traditional rules of precedence and piety with a new realpolitik of expedience, power, and ruthless practicality.

What had changed? How did the old regime of the aged begin to crumble before the new regime of the young?

The single biggest change in Europe's worldview was happening right at the same time. Giordano Bruno's exposition of Copernicus's theories was first published in London in 1584; he was burned at the stake for heresy in 1600. Christopher Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* in 1592 or 1593, shortly before his own highly suspicious death. Galileo was investigating the laws of gravitation in 1602, laws that implied other centers of mass elsewhere in the cosmos. In 1608, across the Channel in Holland, Hans Lippershey applied for a patent for the invention of the telescope, but by that time there were already several other claimants. By 1609, Thomas Hariot, the mathematician who had accompanied Walter Raleigh's first Virginia expedition, and who may have invented his own telescope or "perspective trunke" on the way, was sketching the moon and the sunspots and observations of the orbit of Halley's Comet. Shakespeare and Donne both probably knew Hariot. Shakespeare knew Marlowe. And the creation of Galileo's telescope in 1609 was to lead to his trial for heresy before the Pope.

Copernicus's supposition that the sun was the center of the universe, not the Earth, had already destabilized the old picture. But the observations of the mountains on the Moon and the moons of Jupiter, the implied distance of the "fixed stars" and the staggering vastness they suggested, occasioned a kind of civilizational vertigo with huge philosophical, moral, and emotional effects.

Essentially, the Earth was no longer the center of the universe. And that implied that we humans are not necessarily the chief concern of the Divine. Perhaps He leaves us to our own devices in our little corner of this vast uncaring cosmos, and so our ends justify our means, however ruthless. In all the previous great religions of the world, the history of the world was a drama involving God(s) and

humans, with Nature on earth as God's theater or arena. Now humans were perhaps not the center of things and should look after ourselves, forming omnipotent states to regulate human conduct, and promoting rulers of those states ruthless enough to hold them together. For effective rule, the pieties and the traditions of the old must be crushed.

We have been experiencing the aftershocks of that great change ever since. Science enabled Europe to reduce the rest of the world to colonies. Machiavellian republics crushed old patriarchal tribes, monarchies and oligarchies. Morality became a mixture of psychology and abstract ethical logic.

This change, however much we might regret it, was actually a huge gift to humanity. By all practical measures (longevity, literacy, productivity, wealth, population) the human race flourished and the quality of life improved. The modern world was born. But much was lost. In 1867 Matthew Arnold meditated on the new discoveries of geology that made our human world an infinitesimal blip in the vast chronology of the universe. This is how he put it in "Dover Beach":

> *for the world, which seems*
> *To lie before us like a land of dreams,*
> *So various, so beautiful, so new,*
> *Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,*
> *Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;*
> *And we are here as on a darkling plain*
> *Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,*
> *Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

The Copernican revolution taught us not to revere the wisdom of age and brought on an age of youth, modernity, lightness of being: but it was a world without joy, love, or light. Our freedom—once the foundation of our moral and existential dignity—was only whim, only epiphenomenon.

"Dover Beach," with its near-despair, was of course not the only response to the apparent uselessness and weakness of the old—the grief at the loss of the small world of the past where the old were once respected. Tennyson's magnificent "Ulysses" was another:

> *Come, my friends,*
> *'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.*
> *Push off, and sitting well in order smite*
> *The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds*
> *To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths*
> *Of all the western stars, until I die.*
> *It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:*
> *It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,*
> *And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.*
> *Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'*
> *We are not now that strength which in old days*
> *Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;*
> *One equal temper of heroic hearts,*
> *Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will*
> *To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

Since Shakespeare, after our post-Renaissance demotion from the center of the universe, and after our reduction to atoms in a parentless universe, life-stages have increasingly been described as determinative, whether as Arnold's entropic universe of ignorant armies, Nietzsche's eternal return, or Freud's psychology of unconscious biological drives, or as the sociological determinism of Critical Theory. Tennyson's defiance of our biological fate in a godless world foreshadows post-World War One existentialism, in which the absurd act is the Stranger's only dignified response to the death of the mother.

The "West" has had four hundred years of religious wars, revolutions, and reform to absorb the moral shock of our cosmological revolution. It was not until the twentieth century that the shock hit China, culminating in the Cultural Revolution of 1966. And the defining feature of that revolution was the ruthless shaming and destruction of the older generation by the young, so shockingly reminiscent of the horrors of King Lear.

Just when our irresponsibility peaked, we began to threaten the world.

6. A second revolution

But what if the original revolutionary insight were wrong? Or at least, what if we had totally mistaken its implications? And what if an equally large reversal of human values is happening today? If the pious decency (and obscurantism) of former ages was based on the idea that the Earth was the center of the cosmos, the "Middle Kingdom" of the universe, and if the freedom and enterprise (and brutal exploitation) of the youth-driven post-Renaissance world was based on the idea that the Earth was nothing special, what might be the result of discovering that maybe the Earth is in a strong sense the center of the universe after all?

In 1950 Enrico Fermi was walking to lunch with Edward Teller and the physicists Herbert York and Emil Konopinski. The conversation turned to life on other planets, and to the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere. Frank Drake had not yet formulated his famous 1961 equation that multiplied the various unlikelihoods of intelligent, communicative life evolving—the right kind of star, of planet, of orbit, of planetary chemistry, etc.—to come up with about one hundred million civilizations in the then known universe. But the possibility was already being talked about in the scientific community.

Fermi, listening to the others, blurted out "Then where is everybody?" Surely if we modern humans had been around for a billion years, we would have found means to be everywhere, and our signals across the airwaves would be deafening. Where were the aliens? After the origin of the universe, this is perhaps the biggest question for contemporary space science.

It is beginning to look as if they are not there at all. And new work on the geological history of our planet is beginning to explain how this could be. In a recent article in Science Reports[10], scientists argue that the evolution of advanced communicative civilizations require very special conditions: the presence of simple life, large continents and oceans, and plate tectonics (the strange sliding, colliding, sinking and overriding of gigantic rocky plates across the surface of the Earth) operating for many hundreds of millions of years on a planet in the habitable zone around a star. They point out how extremely important and rare this combination is likely to be. No other planet in our solar system has any of these. Turning to other disciplines, such as evolutionary biology and the history of genetic change on Earth, they show that while simple life and even complex multicellular organisms may exist in the ocean for billions of years, intelligent life with the ability to build rocket ships and transmit radio could not evolve on Earth until plate tectonics emerged. If we add the various unlikelihoods involved in plate tectonics, it makes perfect sense that we may be alone, at least in the Milky Way galaxy, and perhaps in the universe altogether. If we are the first and only intelligent observers of the universe, a second apocalyptic reversal may be under way. Maybe we are the center of the universe after all? Maybe we're not just another bunch of natives in an obscure corner of the cosmos, but

10 Robert J. Stern and Taras V. Gerya, "The importance of continents, oceans and plate tectonics for the evolution of complex life: implications for finding extraterrestrial civilizations." Science Reports 14, article number: 8552 (2024).

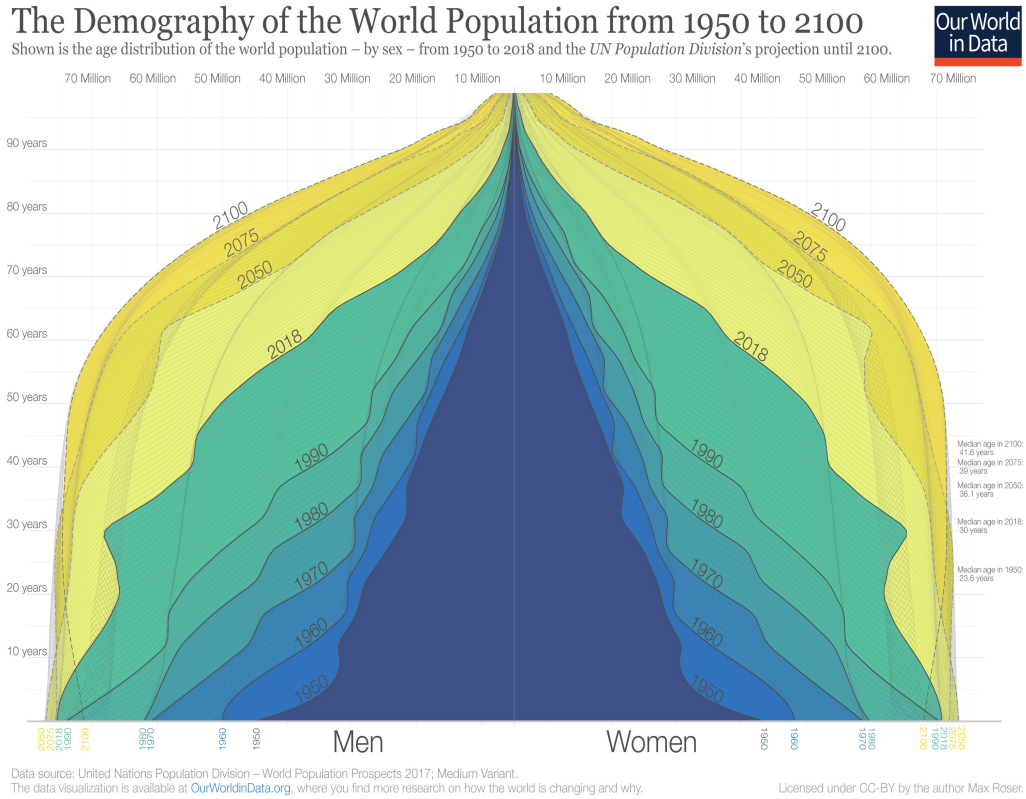
the only moral and intellectual and sentient witness of it all. Maybe we—humans and our sentient kin, the animals and plants—are the eye of the universe, seeing its glory for the first time and giving it meaning?

If this is so, suddenly we have ethical weight again—enormous ethical weight. We cannot waste all those millions of years of suffering, extinction, terror, species loss, catastrophe and grief that got us here. We do have a higher duty after all; to heal our planet, together with all the lifeforms that make up our home; we must emulate the first three billion years of life on Earth and learn from them how to terraform and colonize a new planet, as they did; we must survive, thrive, and strive to populate the galaxy. We need to see the wonders of the universe from as many perspectives as possible, and perhaps create or give birth to different forms of intelligence that are capable of their own forms of wonder. Our weight is as great as it was in medieval times, when the universe was but a little diorama constructed by God to test humans and prepare them for heaven. Our duty is to go on being the only audience for the vast play of material reality, and may be the most important moral priority of all. To put it in theological terms, if God beholds the universe, He beholds it through the eyes of the Earth, the only conscious physical eyes there are. Our planet, in a philosophical sense, might be the center of the universe after all. We may be living in the body of God, building with great pain whatever paradise we can.

And perhaps the inflection in our attitudes had already begun. It had been clear for some time that, unlike the earthly explorers of the renaissance, our celestial explorers were not finding friendly or unfriendly natives, though our science fiction shows the immense desire that we had that they should exist. If we're alone, then what? This thought must surely have crossed the minds of the other two lunch companions, York and Konopinsky. Both had played important parts in the Manhattan Project: both knew that President Truman had ordered the development of the hydrogen bomb that winter, and that Klaus Fuchs had been arrested by the British a month later for selling nuclear secrets to Stalin. And both became vociferous advocates of nuclear disarmament.

In the same year Fermi asked his question, 1950, Margaret Sanger in her 80s proposed to the eminent Catholic gynecologist John Rock at her Massachusetts infertility clinic that the goal of its research should be the oral contraceptive. Just fifteen years later, in 1965, the world fertility index, which plateaued during the sixties at five births per woman, began to drop like a stone. It is now much less, about two, still dropping, and has passed the replacement level, especially in rich countries but increasingly almost everywhere. (The growing world population lags falling fertility because of increased longevity, but will begin to drop in turn in the next few decades.) One consequence of all this has been a precipitate drop in the numbers of young people, and a precipitate rise in the population of the middle-aged and old, as well as in the very old. Barring some catastrophe, the population pyramid—blue in the graph—will become the population cupola. If present trends continue, the average age of the human race is on its way from about 18 to about 45 or 50. Demographically the Senex is not the past, but the future.

Just when we began to recognize our uniqueness in the universe—contra four hundred years of coming to accept that we were just an insignificant speck in its vastness—we simultaneously developed the power to destroy our species completely. And at the same time we developed the means to limit our natural evolutionary growth in numbers, and indeed in the long run to put a gentle end to ourselves by foregoing the tedious labor of reproduction. And that was also the moment when the old had devised a way to outnumber the young; and the young had been given all the freedom in the world to ensure that they would not be succeeded. Just



Source: https://ourworldindata.org/global-population-pyramid

when our irresponsibility peaked, we began to threaten the world. But just when the larger meanings of our lives were overthrown by modernist skepticism, they rose again in the stark possibility that we were alone and maybe in charge of meaning itself.

Shakespeare and Donne recognized the moral and existential implications of the great cosmological change of their own times. What can we learn from them that might enable us to understand and perhaps foresee the changes in values, priorities, ethical guidelines and spiritual meanings that may ensue if Fermi's paradox is no paradox at all? And how might our attitudes change toward the Senex, towards our seniors? What kind of senate might we now need, as George Washington put it, to cool our legislative tea?

The traditional human way of dealing with the demographics of aging is some version of the "seven ages." What the Renaissance cosmological revolution has done, among other things, is to largely overturn the implied roles of the old and young, as illustrated in the citations from Shakespeare, Donne, and Arnold—who were exercising the poets' ancient duty of prophetic alarm system. If we are now undergoing a second cosmological revolution—in which we may end up seeing ourselves as the center of the universe again after four centuries when we didn't—we had better start thinking about what its deeper consequences might be. And here one feature of the traditional life-stage model, the Senex—the old wise-foolish one who has nothing to gain—might prove to be of very great value.

The result of the demographic upset will be the complete overturning of the "population pyramid," so that the population will be dominantly old and middle-aged, youth will be a rarity, and —because of the robotics we are immediately creating for the purpose—work will be coveted and in huge demand.

Let us imagine it: material wealth will be abundant and not much valued, and wisdom will once again be honored as it was in Ptolemaic times. The way we value the opposite sex changes from the passionate desire of the young to the respectful friendship of the old. So perhaps the institution of marriage as friendship will regain its ascendancy over marriage as voracious and even violent need. Classical and medieval beauty and wonder will return as we realize that we are the center of the universe, being the only eyes that can contemplate and assign value to it.

Clearly, we cannot undo—though many might nostalgically wish it—the enormous changes wrought by modernity. Patriarchy, we know, will not do—or will only do if matriarchy fully balances and critiques and is critiqued by it, and youth is still allowed its ambition, enterprise, and creative disruptiveness. The huge advances in science, technology, social organization, economy, and plain human benefit must stand. Members of the Sixties generation are now dying, but they gave us the solar system for our playground through the space program, and an example of what pure freedom might look like, in both its splendor and its horror and degradation.

Perhaps that generation can bequeath something else before it passes. If the future truly is an age of abundance, many of the motivators and scourges of youth will be relieved of their powers. The old have nothing to gain—this is the contentment celebrated in so many of those poems from ancient China—and thus their motivations can be purified of bias and ambition. Their work can be done for its own sake, and thus both its subjects and its results can be given true autonomy, allowed to emerge out of their own interactions, recognizing the deeper satisfactions of beauty and the soul. In such pursuits, envy, exploitation, and even recognition by others have no necessary force. If we no longer need things for their use, we can need them for themselves; a farm animal is prey, but a pet can be a friend.

Some of the greatest artists entered an entirely new phase late in their lives, as Edward Said points out in On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain.[11] Consider Shakespeare's late plays, Beethoven's late quartets, or Yeats' Sailing to Byzantium.The reputation has been made, the battles won or lost. The spirit is free and now it can play. If civilizations can also attain that freedom, maybe a new kind of art and science can be the result. *A*

11 https://www.edwardsaid.org/articles/thoughts-on-late-style/

Wu's Midnight Song

The Chang'an moon just seems a lonesome disc;
from countless homes, I hear their laundering.

The winds of autumn blow incessantly.
The Jade Pass fort is what I'm pondering.

When will we tame the hostage-taking Hu
so that my husband ends his wandering?

(*translated by A.M. Juster from the Chinese of Li Bai*)

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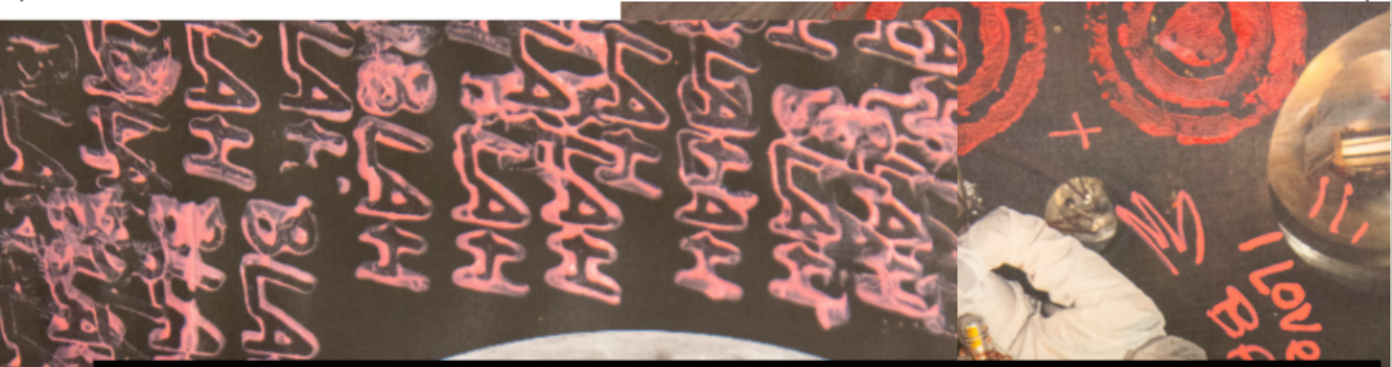

LABSynthE

LabSynthE is a creative lab at the Harry W. Bass Jr. School of Arts, Humanities, and Technology at UT Dallas. We craft electronic and poetic exchanges through emerging media, fostering intimate public experiences. Exhibitions include The Other Art Fair, AURORA's Video Art Nights, Design Week Portland (Oregon), Art & Technology Biennial (Connecticut College), and international venues. Current projects explore memory, translation, and poetry. Led by media artist xtine burrough, we operate collaboratively, welcoming all voices. Weekly meetings open to students and faculty.

COLLABORATE ON UPCOMING FALL 2025 PROJECTS:

Re-Staging of *Comets Love You To the Moon and Back*

Poetic time-based media for Grotte du Lazaret's *Spring of Poets* *in collaboration with sound artist Dr. Frank Dufour and Paleontologist Dr. Emmanuel Desclaux*

Harry W. Bass Jr.
School of Arts, Humanities,
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