

Daniel Schorr: **A Major Issue for the New Congress**

September/October 2008  
A Bimonthly of News Analysis and Opinion  
85th Year of Publication

# THE New Leader

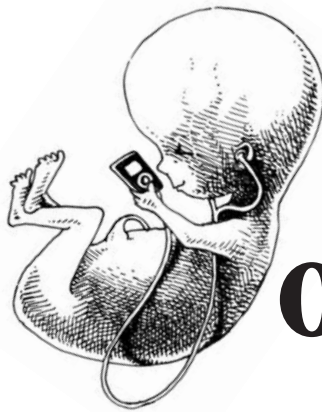
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## Livni's Strategy in Israel

Abraham Rabinovich

## Wireless and



## or Clueless

Stefan Kanfer

## How to Avoid a New Cold War

Robert V. Daniels

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THE BACK OF THE BOOK

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**Essays:** Gavriel Rosenfeld: *The War That Backfired* • Brooke Allen: *A Tragicomic Meditation on Old Age* • Phoebe Pettingell: *How Verse Influences Verse* • **Plus:** Paul Davidson on Steven Stoll's *The Great Delusion*, Stephen J. Whitfield on John Demos' *The Enemy Within*, Christian Lorentzen on Per Petterson's *To Siberia*, Sarah Harrison Smith on Sarah Shun-lien Bynum's *Ms. Hempel Chronicles*

IT HAS LONG been fairly standard to postdate print magazines—particularly weeklies, biweeklies and monthlies. The practice was not introduced to deceive readers in any way. Rather, it was brought on by an effort to counter the inefficiency of the U.S. Postal Service and the desire of publishers to give their products a longer newsstand life. Inevitably the maneuver caused some confusion when an article concerning an ongoing event, like a Presidential election campaign, failed to take account of an important development that occurred before the cover date. To deal with the problem, some publications began noting the date they actually went to press on their table of contents page.

With the advent of the Internet Age print magazines soon faced more complex challenges. In November 1995 *Salon* surfaced as a cyberspace biweekly. It was conceived by David Talbot, an Arts and Ideas editor at the San Francisco *Examiner* who quit his job, rallied a small core of talented writers, secured some meager financing from an executive at the then shaky Apple, and made his dream a reality. Not about to be outdone by an energetic upstart, Microsoft dug into its deep pockets when Michael Kinsley—today a *Time* columnist and television personality—knocked on the door of the company’s campus in Seattle to pitch his own brainchild, and in June 1996 *Slate* was launched.

In response to what quickly became journalism’s new wave, practically all the old-line magazines and newspapers put up Web sites. Besides instant access to their regular fare that over-

# Between Issues

comes Postal Service lagging, the sites offer special articles, updates and interactive features. By the time *Politico* made its debut in January 2007, to “illuminate” the intricacies of “life on Capitol Hill,” if you had nothing else to do you could spend the entire day surfing your favorites—not to mention such lesser lights as the *Huffington Post* and zillions of blogs.

THE NEW LEADER, as you have probably noticed, never sought to enter that frantic competition. We arrived in the Web world with empty pockets and one objective: to keep alive the voice of a venerable publication whose roots date back to January 1924. Fortunately, Columbia University thought the enterprise worthwhile and two years ago enabled the NL to go online as a bimonthly.

In adapting to a new environment we also gave some thought to the relationship between the cover date and the material inside the covers. For example, should a September/October issue be put to bed (to borrow the old print shop parlance) on August 31, or perhaps in the middle of the cycle on September 30, or at the end of it on October 31? We opted for the last. But in truth there is no perfect answer to the question, even in the Internet Age.

So if while reading this issue of the NL you find yourself wondering why there is no mention of the country’s new President, it’s because you know something we didn’t know at bedtime.

OUR COVER DRAWINGS of Israel’s Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and a 21st-century fetus are by Lisa Peet.

# The New Leader

September/October, 2008

Volume XCI, Number 5

|  |    |
|--|----|
| A Major Issue for the New Congress/DANIEL SCHORR ..... | 3  |
| Livni’s Strategy in Israel/ABRAHAM RABINOVICH .....    | 6  |
| How to Avoid a New Cold War/ROBERT V. DANIELS .....    | 9  |
| Wireless and/or Clueless/STEFAN KANFER .....           | 12 |

### Writers and Writing

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The War That Backfired/GAVRIEL ROSENFELD .....        | 15 |
| Responding to Malthus/PAUL DAVIDSON .....             | 18 |
| A History of Hysteria/STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD .....      | 19 |
| A Tragicomic Meditation on Old Age/BROOKE ALLEN ..... | 21 |
| The Austerity Artist/CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN .....        | 23 |
| A Time of Magic/SARAH HARRISON SMITH .....            | 24 |
| How Verse Influences Verse/PHOEBE PETTINGELL .....    | 26 |

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# Washington Notebook

By Daniel Schorr

## A Major Issue for the New Congress

IN A *Wall Street Journal*-NBC poll last July, 53 per cent of the respondents said they want government to do more to solve problems. Thus America entered one of its periodic swings between deregulation and regulation. If history is any guide, that may lead to demands for new laws and perhaps new agencies to police the behavior of financial giants.

In the 1900s President Theodore Roosevelt carried out his philosophy of the Square Deal. He reacted to a series of business scandals by using the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and other measures to regulate the economy.

In the 1930s President Franklin D. Roosevelt, facing the Great Depression, gave us the New Deal. Among other things, he established the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

The 1980s witnessed a period of rolling back regulation under President Ronald Reagan. This was followed by the Savings and Loan scandals that gave us the Sav-

ings Association Insurance Fund and the Resolution Trust Corporation in 1989.

Shortly after the turn of the century the Enron and WorldCom accounting scandals surfaced. They resulted in legislation that changed corporate governance and accounting practices. Called the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, it was advanced by Paul S. Sarbanes (D.-Md.) and Michael G. Oxley (R.-Oh.), chairmen of the Senate and House Banking Committees, respectively.

Now we have the investment bank meltdown. The current impulse for new controls was signaled by the *Wall Street Journal* on July 25 with an article headlined, "Amid Turmoil, U.S. Turns Away from Decades of Deregulation."

Yet even with Wall Street in shambles, those ideologically opposed to regulation were not ready to give up. A briefing paper of the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) warned against a "rush to regulate," saying an ambitious agenda of reform in the midst of a financial crisis is "an invitation to bad regulation."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D.-Calif.) says Americans "have had it." This is likely to remain a major issue for the next Congress.

## While America Burned

I WAS REMINDED of Rome in its decline, glorying in its circuses and gladiators even with the Visigoths at the gates. In the South our cities were being lashed by hurricanes, in the North our great temples of capitalism were crumbling, and our aspirants for the Presidency, Senators John McCain (R.-Ariz.) and Barack Obama (D.-Ill.) were debating such subjects as lipstick on a pig.

The rhythm of the campaign was disturbed by the Wall Street meltdown. McCain, who stuck to his mantra—"the fundamentals of our economy are strong"—blamed greed and mismanagement for the trouble. He called for a commission to study the crisis. Obama said that idea amounted to "passing the buck." He blamed the ideology of deregulation.

But soon the candidates were back to attacking each other. And the campaign was distracted by the woman in the contest. Not simply any woman, but a woman who has done it all, from governing a town and a state to presiding over a family with a pregnant teenage daughter.

At one point the campaign came to resemble theater. Some people at Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin's rallies wore pink buttons reading, "Hot Chicks Vote Republican." Her first major interview was reviewed like a performance. New York *Times* columnist William Kristol criticized Charles Gibson of ABC for acting "as if he were a senior professor forced to waste time administering a Ph.D. exam to a particularly unpromising graduate student."

So much for the big issues.

What else was the campaign about? Change, mavericks, outsiders vs. Washington insiders and, in the homestretch, wealth distribution.

The last was seized upon by the McCain camp when Obama told the now famous Joe the Plumber, during the third Presidential debate, that nobody likes high taxes, but when you spread the

wealth around it's good for everybody. That was it. McCain accused his opponent of waging class warfare. He suggested that Obama might be talking socialism. Why McCain should be concerned is hard to imagine. The George W. Bush Administration is engaged in a gigantic redistribution of wealth to the banks. Perhaps it is redistribution to the poor that the Republican nominee was worried about.

The gap between rich and poor is greater in America than in any other advanced democracy. Differential tax rates have been at the core of the American tax structure since 1913. That was when the 16th Amendment to the Constitution created the income tax on individuals and corporations. There have been recurrent proposals to substitute a flat tax or a consumption tax that would treat the wealthy and the poor evenhandedly. But in the United States, where the top 10 per cent reached a level of income share not seen since the Depression, the differential income tax has remained secure.

There are other ways of shifting wealth that few would term class warfare: unemployment insurance, food stamps, housing vouchers, earned income tax credits. And the funny thing about Joe the unlicensed plumber is that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual income of real plumbers in Ohio is under \$48,000. Senator McCain may argue that creating new wealth is better than redistributing existing wealth. Shifting wealth, though, has always been a part of the American credo, and is not inconsistent with creating wealth.

## Altering Our Political Dictionary

ONE OF THE casualties of the financial crisis is the word *fundamental*, as in "the fundamentals remain strong." That was once a favorite response of President Bush when he was asked about the economy.

The crisis has a way of altering our po-

litical dictionary. Another word that has gone into disrepute is *deregulation*, as in candidate McCain's "I am always for less regulation." That is, "always" until the Administration's bailout of the huge AIG insurance company, with its strong element of regulation.

Similarly, *insider* has become a less negative designation. Washington insiders were usually lumped with lobbyists and special interests. Governor Palin was hailed as a consummate outsider from way up north. But the financial crisis has called on the talents of insiders. Norman J. Ornstein of the AEI defended himself in the *Washington Post* as a "card-carrying insider." He said the bully pulpit was no substitute for knowing how to get things done in Washington.

Then there is *change*, a subject of contention between the warring candidates. Once polls showed that voters were anxious for change, the tendency was for candidates to try to capture the word by promising real change or fundamental change, except that fundamental had become a no-no word.

## Iraq's Bet on the U.S. Election

AT HIS FIRST news conference in January 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced the release of two American airmen whose reconnaissance plane had been shot down over the Soviet Union the previous July. This was taken as a positive gesture to the new President by Communist Party chief Nikita S. Khrushchev, who was not on good terms with President Dwight D. Eisenhower after the shooting down of a U2 spy plane on May 1, 1960, and the consequent collapse of a Paris Summit set to start 12 days later.

I recalled that because something comparable, a new start with a new President, may be possible in Iraq. The Bush Administration is in terrible trouble trying to negotiate an agreement with the Baghdad government covering the continued stationing of U.S. troops in Iraq. A tentative accord, months in the making, is hung up in the Iraqi Cabinet, and it is unlikely that there will be any resolution by the time the current United Nations mandate authorizing multinational military operations in Iraq expires on December 31.

There was talk of extending the UN mandate for another year. But there has recently been bad blood between the Bush Administration and the

Kremlin over issues like the Russian invasion of Georgia. So it looked as though Russia would use its veto in the Security Council to block an extension, leaving the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq with no legal underpinning—stuck between Iraq and a hard place, you might say.

To everybody's surprise, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced that Moscow will support an Iraqi request for the UN mandate to be extended. He said Russia was convinced that a complete pullout of international forces would not be advisable. That will take some of the pressure off as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tries to negotiate an agreement in the face of widespread Iraqi opposition.

Iraq's political leaders said, however, that no deal was expected before the American Presidential election on November 4. Having written off the Bush Administration, they were presumably counting on a victory by Barack Obama, who had shown a willingness to accept a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops. You get it? Foreign leaders placed their bets on an American election race all over again.



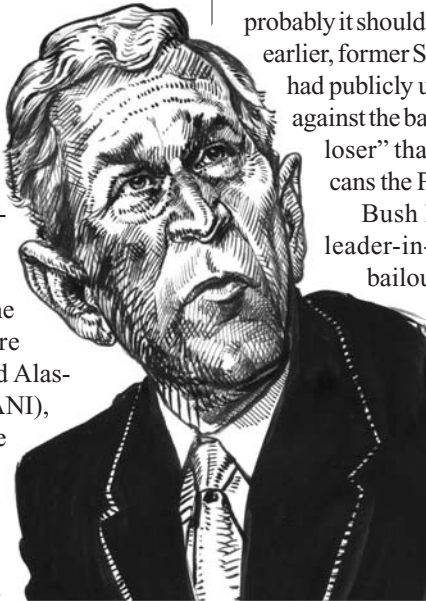
# Saving Face Instead of the Public

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION tends to treat performance problems as public relations problems. For example, when the Department of Education came under fire for its implementation of No Child Left Behind, it paid a conservative commentator, Armstrong Williams, \$24,000 to say nice things about the program.

More recently, when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) drew criticism for lagging performance on salmonella poisoning and other inspection failures, it responded by offering a \$330,000 contract to a public relations firm to improve its image. Not just any public relations firm, but one with friends in the agency, Qorvis Communications. The law, though, requires competitive bidding.

The Washington *Post* revealed that the FDA found an ingenious way around that. As an exception, the law permits awarding noncompetitive contracts to Alaskan Native enterprises. The contract was therefore given to a group called Alaska Newspapers Inc. (ANI), and the work was to be handed over to Qorvis Communications. This was made explicit in correspondence unearthed by the *Post*. One e-mail last October said ANI would “gladly serve” as prime contractor for the “FDA deal,” with Qorvis acting as subcontractor.

John D. Dingell (D.-Mich.), chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which has jurisdiction over the FDA, says: “The agency chose to use its limited resources to save face instead of saving the public health. This sham of a contract calls into question the integrity of Federal contracts awarded to



small businesses and Alaska Native corporations.”

I can't wait for the next revelation of a Bush Administration image-polishing venture.

## A Very Lame Duck

THERE WAS something almost touching about what happened to President Bush on September 29. At 7:34 A.M., he stepped into the White House driveway and told the assembled press that the leaders of both parties supported the economic bailout bill and now their members had to “send a strong signal to markets at home and abroad.” Some six hours later the House rejected the bill, with two-thirds of the Republican members opposed.

It was a stunning surprise, although probably it should not have been. A week earlier, former Speaker Newt Gingrich had publicly urged members to vote against the bailout, calling it “a dead loser” that might cost Republicans the Presidential election.

Bush had served as cheerleader-in-chief for government bailouts. On September 18, he announced he was canceling out-of-town travel that day to closely monitor the situation of failing banks. On September 24, he warned that without immediate Congressional action, America could “slip into a financial panic.” And finally, on September 29, his early-morning appeal for passage of the \$700 billion bailout.

Seldom have we witnessed such dramatic evidence of the withering of Presidential authority. After sweeping Democratic losses in the Congressional election of 1994, President Bill Clinton felt obliged to say that the President is relevant. President Bush, in his closing weeks in office, appears to have become

all but irrelevant where Congress is concerned.

He did not attempt any dramatic display of leadership, like going up to Capitol Hill to exert pressure on lagging legislators. Behind the scenes he did lobby by his own Texas Republican delegation by phone, and they voted 15 to 4 against him. The nitty-gritty of hammering out a compromise measure with Congress was left to Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr.

President Bush is a very lame duck.

## Slipping into the Twilight

BOB WOODWARD'S latest book, *The War Within*, says the Bush Administration conducted an extensive electronic spying operation on Iraq's prime minister.

Ron Suskind's new book, *The Way of the World*, asserts that a document used by the White House to justify invading Iraq was forged by the CIA (at the White House's behest). The forged document indicated that Mohamed Atta, ringleader of the 9/11 terrorists, had been trained in Iraq. (The White House denies the story.)

Perhaps as great a surprise as any was the disclosure, in a report by the Justice Department's inspector general, that an Administration obsessed with secrecy broke the rules on protecting secrets. The IG report said former Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales took home with him classified information relating to the National Security Agency's wiretapping program and the Administration's prisoner interrogation program.

The documents were what is known as “SCI,” Sensitive Compartmented Information. While in government service, Gonzales received at least two personnel briefings on the handling of sensitive information and documents. He signed a form testifying to his awareness that mishandling such information could cause “irreparable injury to the United States.”

Gonzales had to resign as attorney general for another reason—the politicization of Justice Department hirings. And so the Bush Presidency slips into the twilight.

## Letting the Public Decide

# Livni's Strategy in Israel

By Abraham Rabinovich

**D** DEALING with two pouting ex-generals—Ehud Barak and Shaul Mofaz—Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni exhibited grace in victory on September 17 when she refrained from gloating over winning the Kadima Party leadership primaries. Despite the macho pair's best efforts to block her, she invited them to sit with her at the political high table.

Defense Minister Barak had been the nastier of the two. He tried to disparage her credibility as a prime ministerial candidate during the Kadima primary campaign even though he isn't a member of her party but head of the Labor Party. "I'm not convinced that when it comes to important security issues . . . the foreign minister has what it takes to provide answers," he said.

Some political observers speculated that Barak, a former Army chief of staff, could not adjust to the thought that he might have

to accept direction on security matters from a female. In a schoolboy-like attempt to put Livni in her place, he referred to her publicly as "Tzipporah," a Biblical name that may indeed be on her birth certificate yet in the context was recognizably supercilious, the opposite in intent of the affectionate diminutive "Tzipi" by which she is known to all. Instead of calling to congratulate her when her victory was announced, as was expected from the head of a party that is Kadima's major partner in the ruling coalition, he went off to a highly publicized meeting with the leader of the opposition, Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu, suggesting he was exploring the establishment of a coalition excluding Kadima.

Mofaz, a former defense minister and Army chief of staff, adopted the same dismissive tone regarding Livni's leadership qualities, but that could be viewed as legitimate since he was Livni's main opponent in the primary campaign. "Whoever lacks understanding in security matters,"

said Mofaz, "cannot serve as prime minister." Before the voting began, Mofaz said he would remain in the party regardless of who won. Minutes before the results were to be announced, however, he declared that he was taking a "time out" from politics and disappeared from view without calling Livni to congratulate her. (He claimed he was a victim of voting irregularities, including miscounts and a polling station kept open after the official closing hour, which may be true.)

Within 10 days, Barak and his wife accepted a dinner invitation extended by the Livnis and he was discussing the terms under which he would serve in a Livni administration. Mofaz, too, resurfaced and was considering whatever senior ministerial post Livni would deign to offer him.

The kindest words Livni received after her primary victory came from, of all places, Damascus. The official newspaper *Tishrin*, mouthpiece of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad's regime, pro-



SHAUL MOFAZ

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ABRAHAM RABINOVICH writes frequently for the *NEW LEADER* on the Middle East. His latest book, *The Yom Kippur War*, is now available in paperback.

vided an almost fawning assessment of the female politician who might assume Israel's helm. "Mossad beauty Tzipi Livni is the leading political figure in Israel and the frontrunner to enter the prime minister's club," said an editorial. "She has all the qualities possessed by past Israeli prime ministers from David Ben-Gurion to Ehud Olmert."

Livni herself has not always been sure she possessed those qualities. As foreign minister and one of the two figures closest to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon when he was felled by a stroke three years ago, she avoided a bid for the top post and immediately announced her backing of Olmert as Sharon's successor. She grew increasingly restive about Olmert's leadership, particularly after he treated her disdainfully at the start of the 2006 Lebanon war when she attempted to seek a diplomatic solution rather than wrest a military victory. In explaining her decision last month to go for the brass ring, she said: "the last three years enabled me to better understand the essence of decisions."

The ring, alas, proved harder to get than the centrist Kadima Party's top post. After almost six weeks of negotiations, Livni was not able to put together a coalition she considered viable. On October 26, she opted for early elections that will probably be held in February. Livni will face a stiff fight from Netanyahu, who rejected her offer to join her in a government of national unity, and it is far from certain who will prevail.

**L**IVNI'S AMBITION is fueled by a sense of urgency about reaching an agreement with the Palestinian Authority (PA) before Israel's political situation deteriorates. After having viewed her political colleagues close up, she feels best qualified for the critical task. "This opportunity must not be missed," she says. "We must clarify for ourselves whether it has a chance." For the past year, as foreign minister, Livni has been engaging in talks with the PA. Almost no details about them are known. The talks are partly real, partly virtual, since the PA only controls the West Bank, and barely at that, while Hamas, which is

committed to Israel's destruction, firmly controls the other half of the Palestinian entity, the Gaza Strip. How does one make peace with the Palestinians when there are two polarized Palestines?

The complex course Livni intends to follow reportedly goes

like this:

Negotiate with the moderate leaders of the PA and arrive at an agreement to establish an interim Palestinian state within temporary borders. Subsequent gestures, such as releasing Palestinian prisoners and easing security roadblocks, would be aimed at increasing support for the PA among the Palestinian electorate by showing that it can achieve positive results. Moderate Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt would then be asked to endorse the agreement. With the agreement's legitimacy thus established, it would be at the center of new Palestinian elections and offer the Palestinian public for the first time a clear political horizon and promise of statehood. If the moderates win the elections, the PA and Israel would enter the next stage: A strengthened PA would dismantle the militants' infrastructure and Israel would dismantle the settlements, both prodigious tasks. If that is successfully accomplished—a monumental uncertainty—a final peace agreement with permanent borders could be put together.

This vision of a Jewish state coexisting peacefully alongside a Palestinian state between the Mediterranean coast and the Jordan River would have been anathema to Livni's Right-wing parents, who fought for a Jewish state that would stretch from the sea to the river, leaving no room for another sovereignty. Her father, Eitan, was a militant operations officer in the Irgun underground led by Menachem Begin before the re-creation of Israel. Her mother, Sara, was

prominent in the organization as well. "I reached my own conclusion," says Tzipi Livni, "that there is a need to divide the land."

Raised in an ideologically centered household where there was no parental hugging but high educational demands, Livni excelled during her Army service, twice being chosen outstanding cadet in officer courses.

Upon being mustered out at 22, she was invited to join the Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, and spent most of the next four years in Paris. A senior Mossad official who served with her, Mirla Gal, praised her "cleverness, coolness, speed of analysis, honesty." Livni, however, chose not to make a career underground, as her parents did, and returned to Israel to go to law school and marry. Even after entering the political arena, she kept her private life to herself. Only recently has the public learned that she is married to an advertising executive with whom she has two sons. Her seeming reserve in personal relations is sometimes regarded as aloofness, but close friends say it is more akin to bashfulness.



**EHUD BARAK**

**O**LMERT HAS LEFT his successor a stunning legacy: his personal political program that spells out publicly what Israel must give up in order to have peace with the Palestinians and Syria. The bottom line: Israel must relinquish almost all the territory won in the Six-Day War that it still holds, including East Jerusalem. His generous proposal was immediately termed an Israeli commitment by the PA and by Syria, to the chagrin of Livni and Netanyahu.

As a young Knesset member Olmert voted against Israel's peace agreement with Egypt in defiance of his party leader, Prime Minister Begin. As mayor of Jerusalem between 1993-2003 he provocatively pushed the construction of housing

for Right-wing Jewish settlers in the heart of Arab neighborhoods. “I wanted to impose Israeli sovereignty over the entire city,” said Olmert in an interview with the newspaper *Ha’aretz*. “I admit it. A substantial part of the past 35 years I was not willing to look at reality in all its depth.”

The only rational choice for the nation, he said, is giving up the captured territories. “We have to make a decision, one that goes against all our instincts, against our collective memory, against the prayers of the Jewish people for 2,000 years. Israel must withdraw from almost all, if not all, of the West Bank. No Israeli leader has said this before me.” As for peace with Syria, the price was clear: “Is there any person in Israel who believes that peace with Syria is possible without giving up the Golan?”

Livni, who has made a similar U-turn from her Right-wing roots, may even agree with everything Olmert said. But she was furious at hearing him say it out loud while negotiations launched at Annapolis last year were under way.

Although the disparaging pre-primary assessments by Barak and Mofaz were directed at Livni, it seemed obvious that both men believed a woman, any woman, should not be asked to pick up a ringing phone at 3 A.M. that might require a decision on troop movements. They had conveniently failed to recall that the only Israeli leader ever awakened by a pre-dawn call warning of imminent war was a 75-year-old grandmother, Golda Meir. Her subsequent performance should have made it apparent that it is character, not gender, that counts in a crisis.

It was 4:30 A.M. when the phone rang at Mrs. Meir’s bedside on Yom Kippur morning in 1973. The caller was her military aide, Brigadier General Yisrael Lior, passing on a report from the Mossad that the armies of Egypt and Syria would attack Israel at dusk. Her instinctive response was less than decisive: “Yisrael, what do we do now?”



**GOLDA MEIR**

Mrs. Meir had never been short on courage. On the eve of Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, she crossed into Jordanian territory dressed as an Arab woman in an attempt to persuade King Abdullah to stay out of the fighting. She knew nothing about military matters and had admitted to General Lior once that she did not know what a division was. But she had two stalwarts on whom she could rely—Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, Israel’s military icon, and Chief of Staff General David Elazar, a strong leader.

When she arrived at her office Yom Kippur morning, gray-faced at the prospect of heavy casualties, she discovered that Dayan and Elazar disagreed about what should be done. Elazar wanted immediate mobilization of the reserves, who constituted two-thirds of Israel’s Army. He also wanted a pre-emptive air strike. Dayan refused to authorize either request. Despite the Mossad warning, the defense minister was not convinced war was imminent. A similar warning the previous spring had proved false. Mobilization, he said, would be widely viewed as an act of war and could provoke the Arabs to attack. Likewise, the world (read Washington) would not accept another pre-emptive strike only six years after Israel had carried one out in the Six-Day War.

As the generals and other advisers debated the issue in her office, Mrs. Meir realized she would have to decide. She lit cigarette after cigarette, filling the room with acrid smoke that made those present squint. She hesitated, then made an unequivocal decision. There would be no pre-emptive strike. Israel might soon need American material and political aid, and it was imperative for it to be clear that Israel had not started the war. “If we strike first we won’t get help from anybody,” she said. But she agreed with Elazar’s demand for immediate mobilization of all reserve combat units. “If war does break out, better to be

in proper shape to deal with it even if it angers the world.”

Falling back on common sense and political experience, she had come to the right conclusions. Her decision on mobilization saved the Golan Heights that night when reservists, summoned from Yom Kippur prayers in the few hours before war began, stemmed the Syrian tide in fierce tank battles. Refraining from a pre-emptive attack also ensured vital political and logistic support from Washington in the crucial days ahead.

Mrs. Meir made another fateful decision that morning, this time under her mandate as grandmother rather than prime minister. Dayan wanted the evacuation of children from Golan Heights settlements delayed until late afternoon, just before the expected attack, in the hope that the war threat would dissipate before then. Mrs. Meir ordered the children taken down immediately. When the war began hours earlier than expected with a massive Syrian artillery barrage on all settlements, the children and their mothers were safely away.

**A**T A CABINET meeting, Dayan had briefed his colleagues in a wavering voice as he described a situation in which two massed armies were preparing to attack in hours while the bulk of Israel’s Army was still unmobilized. Mrs. Meir had walked heavily when she entered the room; when she spoke her voice was firm. She would leave the running of the war to Dayan and Elazar, particularly the latter. Called upon to make decisions in the coming weeks, she did so sensibly. She never broke down even when strong men around her quivered.

Unlike Golda Meir, Tzipi Livni, 50, has a security background, one that includes service as a lieutenant in the Army and her years as a Mossad operative in Europe. She also was raised in a security-focused home. This does not necessarily mean she would be steadfast in a crisis. It is simply to say Mrs. Meir’s Yom Kippur performance clearly demonstrated that women are capable of confronting predawn crises more acute than a crying baby.

## Some Lessons of History

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# How to Avoid a New Cold War

By Robert V. Daniels

**I**S THE FUTURE of the West's relationship with Russia as dire as many contend in the wake of the August war between Russia and the former Soviet republic of Georgia? Do we face a new Cold War? What should the United States do in this dicey situation?

These questions cannot be constructively addressed without examining the historical and ethnographical circumstances that set the stage for the worst East-West dustup since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. Admittedly the picture is complicated, but that is part of the problem for U.S. policy makers.

The most basic principle of politics in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region is hard for Americans to grasp, because it is foreign to our melting pot experience: Nationality, in that part of the world, is not the same thing as citizenship. Soviet identity papers, for example, always had a separate line for an individual's "nationality," be it Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, or even Jewish, Abkhazian or Ossetian.

By the time of the 1917 Revolution, half the population in the expanding Russian Empire consisted of restive non-Russians. The USSR, really a re-

furbished reincarnation of the empire, gave ethnic minorities pro forma recognition and language rights under a dummy federalism of "Union republics" (such as Georgia) and, for lesser ethnic groups, "autonomous republics" and "autonomous provinces." But the lines between ethnic groups long intermixed in defunct empires could not be delineated any more neatly in the Soviet Union than in post-Versailles Europe. Wherever one drew a boundary there were always ethnic minorities who found themselves on the wrong side of the line.

The Georgians have a venerable history going back to the Middle Ages and their own King David, "David the Builder," who fought off the Turks and Persians with great *éclat*. In the early 1800s, however, they submitted to annexation by their Eastern Orthodox coreligionists of the Russian Empire to shield themselves from the Muslim infidels to the south. After the Revolution the Communists forcibly kept Georgia in the new Soviet Union, while placing within its boundaries two non-Georgian autonomous republics, Abkhazia in Georgia's northwestern finger along the Black Sea coast, and Ossetia up against the

Caucasus Mountains in the center of Georgia.

Under Moscow's rule the Caucasus region, like other minority areas, remained more or less quiescent, until Mikhail S. Gorbachev decided to revitalize the Soviet Union in the 1980s by relaxing the central dictatorship. That experiment blew up in his face, as long-suppressed ethnic discontents among the non-Russian minorities erupted into irresistible separatism.

Today's trouble can be dated precisely to June 1988, when the 19th Communist Party Conference acceded to Gorbachev's proposal to allow democratic elections, both for the Union government and the republics. Local elections in 1990 brought non-Communists to power in most of the republics, including the huge Russian Republic where Boris N. Yeltsin gained his power base. Georgia, under its new president, the dissident intellectual Zviad Gamsakhurdia, followed the example of the Baltic republics and declared its independence, even before Yeltsin formally dissolved the Soviet Union.

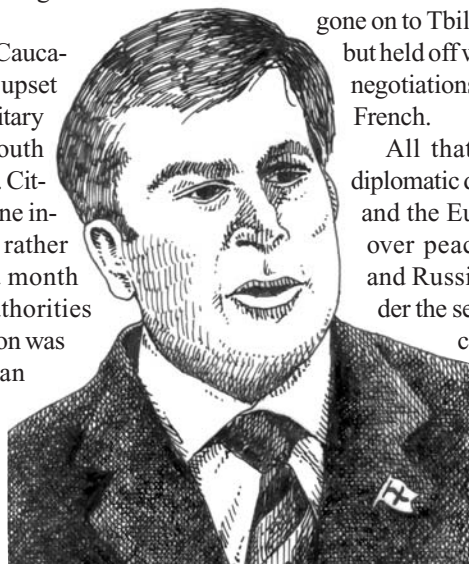
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That seemed like a good idea to the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, who promptly declared their own independence from Georgia. Gamsakhurdia replied by trying to abolish the separate status of those autonomous republics, and war ensued. Cease-fires brokered by Moscow in the early 1990s left Abkhazia and South Ossetia de jure part of Georgia but de facto independent, with Russian as well as Georgian “peacekeepers” in place. These were only two of the many “frozen conflicts” around the old Soviet periphery. To be sure, Russian sympathy for the separatists in Georgia was not a matter of consistent principle, witness Russia’s violent suppression of its own separatists in Chechnya.

**F**OUR YEARS AGO, the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia came unfrozen. The meltdown followed a coup that installed Georgia’s current American-educated and -backed president, Mikheil Saakashvili, on a platform of fully reintegrating the separatist regions. Tensions have run high ever since, partly because the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia—as everywhere else in the former Soviet Union—are imperfect, leaving Georgian minorities in both.

The precarious Caucasian appellation was upset when Georgian military forces attacked South Ossetia last August. Citing alleged telephone intercepts (released, rather unconvincingly, a month later), Georgian authorities insist that their action was a reply to a Russian invasion of Georgian territory. But even the introduction of Russian reinforcements into South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel beneath the spine of the Caucasus Mountains was from Georgia’s point of view a violation of the republic’s sovereignty.



**MIKHEIL SAKASHVILI**

What really happened the night of August 7? It is well established that the Georgians opened a surprise artillery and rocket bombardment of South Ossetia’s capital, Tskhinvali, a town of some 20,000 residents in easy range. The Russians clearly had prior intelligence about the attack. They had already evacuated most of the civilian population and positioned troops at their end of the Roki Tunnel.

On August 8, Georgian troops briefly occupied Tskhinvali, but the small unit of Russian peacekeepers stationed there held out at their headquarters. Russian reinforcements came through the two and a half-mile tunnel as fast as the tortuous access roads permitted. This was not exactly a “massive invasion,” as some commentators claim, though widespread Russian air strikes seem to have demoralized the Georgians. Their Army retreated precipitously; outside of Tskhinvali there was evidently little if any contact between the opposing ground forces, either within South Ossetia or beyond the border with Georgia proper.

The Russians pushed ahead at will into the town of Gori (Stalin’s birthplace), about 15 miles over the line, and into the Black Sea port of Poti, about 25 miles from Abkhazia. They could easily have gone on to Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, but held off while hasty cease-fire negotiations were initiated by the French.

All that remained was the diplomatic dance between Russia and the European Union (EU) over peacekeeping monitors and Russia’s withdrawal. Under the settlement finally concluded, the Russians pulled back from the five-mile buffer zones they had established beyond the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and turned them over to EU monitors. But they would not agree to having EU monitors in the two separatist regions and kept their own forces in both. A net Russian gain, cemented

by Moscow’s formal recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics.

**T**HE WHOLE EPISODE raises puzzling questions. Most widely debated is why the Russians appeared to welcome a *casus belli*. My own view is that they feared not responding to Georgia’s attack on their clients in South Ossetia would confirm the world’s sense of their post-Soviet impotence. Underlying this anxiety was their lingering humiliation and chagrin over the dismemberment of the Soviet (i.e. Russian) Empire—articulated rather extravagantly by Vladimir V. Putin when he was president as “the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century.” The knife began to be turned in that wound by the West’s recognizing the independence of Serbia’s Albanian-dominated Kosovo Province, a close parallel to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia situation. The limit for Moscow was probably crossed by NATO’s promise at its Bucharest summit last April to consider a “membership action plan” (with its potential military guarantees) for the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia. So when the Caucasus crisis came to a head on August 7, the Russian leadership perhaps thought it a good idea to give other parts of the former Soviet Union an admonitory lesson.

A second murky question is whether the U.S. had a role in the initiation of hostilities. Saakashvili was embraced as an American ally from the moment he assumed power, and Georgia is strategically situated on the new pipeline designed to carry oil from the Caspian Basin to Turkey without going through Russia. Moreover, there had already been a measure of U.S. military aid to Georgia, mainly in training and equipping the 2,000 troops it sent to Iraq. If any additional aid was supplied, it obviously was not very effective.

Whatever the case, American intelligence must have been aware of the preparations for battle on both the Georgian and Russian sides, because Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice emphatically warned the Saakashvili government not

to provoke the Russians. Even some of his former supporters in Georgia have faulted him for defying this advice.

Could there have been back-channel communications between Washington and Tbilisi carrying a contrary message? We know that a back channel existed, in the person of Randy Scheunemann, Republican Presidential standard-bearer John McCain's chief foreign policy adviser, who was a Washington lobbyist for Georgia. What advice may have passed through that channel, or why, we do not know. But given President Saakashvili's hotheadedness, and his longstanding commitment to bring the separatists into line, a wink and a nod would have been enough to set him off. Still, all we can say definitely is that he made his move, the Russians reacted predictably, and American leaders have outdone one another in denouncing the Russian "invasion" and promising massive aid to the Georgians. Maybe a new Cold War is on after all.

**W**HAT SHOULD the U.S. do at this sticky point? The answer really depends on one's strategic vision for the country. It could strive to maintain its place as the world's dominant superpower. Or it could retreat behind the walls of Fortress America and simply defend our national interests. Or it could aim for global reconciliation.

The superpower approach has dominated U.S. policy toward Russia ever since the end of the original Cold War. It means seizing any opportunity to press for political and military advantage, regardless of the rhetoric emanating from Washington about a "strategic partnership." Thus the expansion of NATO into the post-Communist vacuum, taking advantage of the anti-Russian sentiment among the former Soviet subjects and making the whole region between the Baltic and Black Seas a new American sphere of influence. Russia's attempts to reassert its influence in any of the former Soviet republics, if only by wielding its oil weapon, are therefore labeled "aggression," to be resisted by whatever steps are required.

Just now Georgia is the front line, but it could soon be sharing the spotlight with Ukraine. Despite their substantial differences, the two countries have been bracketed as NATO candidates. Ukraine has 10 times the population of Georgia, sits astride the main oil and gas conduits from Russia to Europe, is historically and linguistically much closer to Russia, and includes a significant Russian minority. Russian-speaking areas such as Odessa, the Donets industrial basin, and the Crimean Peninsula with its famous Sevastopol naval base were placed quite arbitrarily by the Soviet authorities inside the administrative borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. By contrast, Western Ukraine, the most anti-Russian, pro-European region of the republic, was never part of the empire until Stalin seized it from Poland in 1939. In religion it adheres to the Uniate or Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite, not to Orthodoxy. Central Ukraine, around Kiev, is of a mixed mind.

Everything in Ukraine, from election returns to languages taught in school, reflects its divisions. As a NATO candidate it would be exceptional: a country where membership is opposed by a large segment of public opinion, even a majority in some polls. Pressing for NATO acceptance of Ukraine would only be a power play, hardly the outreach to pro-American sentiment that NATO has been in Eastern Europe.

Getting America's relations with Russia onto a more promising track would not be easy, given the stands of both sides and the wounds that have been inflicted. One can sooner imagine a Fortress America or a Fortress Western Hemisphere approach. That would let the rest of the world congeal into a multipolar system of competing power blocs, where the Europeans would have to balance Russia off on their own and decide themselves how to handle situations like the Caucasus. This would be in line with the words uttered by former Secretary of State James A. Baker when Yugoslavia started to fall apart: "We don't have a dog in that fight." But it is hard to see Washington backing away from its new commitment to support Georgia,

not to mention Iraq, Israel, or U.S. oil interests.

**I**NTERNATIONAL RECONCILIATION is a more attractive, if uncertain, prospect. One concrete step would be neutralizing areas of contention between the U.S. and other powers, if images of a Hitlerian juggernaut can be set aside. Finland is the model. By tacit agreement it was made militarily neutral between the Western and Eastern blocs during the Cold War. That solution used to be derided as "Finlandization," but left internally free to develop, Finland has become one of the world's most shining social and economic success stories (and is today a member of the EU, though not of NATO). The same could have worked for the band of countries between the Baltic and Black Seas, and kept the door open for a gradual integration of Russia into Western multilateral institutions. It is now a lost opportunity, yet neutrality may still be an option for the Caucasus.

For smaller, restive minority groups inside a larger country the recipe is simple: federalism. Real federalism, that is, as loose as necessary, with equal rights for citizens of any ethnic affiliation in a given jurisdiction. Here the unsung model is post-Franco Spain, which has rejected the country's traditional centralism in favor of genuine federalism for Castilian-speaking provinces as well as for the linguistically distinct regions of Catalonia, the Basque Provinces, and Galicia in the northwest.

Of course, Spain's solution is not without its problems. Besides, the concept of federalism may be difficult for others to understand, as it has been for the Georgians ever since 1990, or for any people whose only experience has been under some sort of centralized monarchy or despotism. Federalism was difficult even for the United States, where a civil war was fought over what it means.

Nevertheless, federalism is the only reasonable solution for an ethnic crazy quilt like the Caucasus. Surprisingly, Spanish statesmen have not done much to publicize the relevance of their country's experience in places like Georgia. They still have an opportunity.

# Culture Watching

## Wireless and/or Clueless

By Stefan Kanfer

PERHAPS THE MOST anthologized, and least insightful, utterance by a Canadian is Marshall McLuhan's "The new electronic independence re-creates the world in the image of a global village." It could of course be argued that since McLuhan died in 1980, he had no idea of what the electronic future would bring. But the evidence was all around him even in the '70s, when the personal computer was in its infancy.

Merriam-Webster defines *village* as "a settlement usually larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town." Those of us who live in villages know that our neighborhoods are safe because every face and tree is familiar. Even a strange dog on the street elicits attention. Nothing could be more different from a real village than today's global community, with its cell phones, iPhones, iPods, Bluetooth and BlackBerry devices, and scan-deep Internet search engines.

Only a Paleo-Luddite would wish to turn the clock back to a time when data were laboriously unearthed from piles of yellowed newspaper files and deteriorating scrapbooks, and communication between people in different states—let alone continents—was expensive, brief

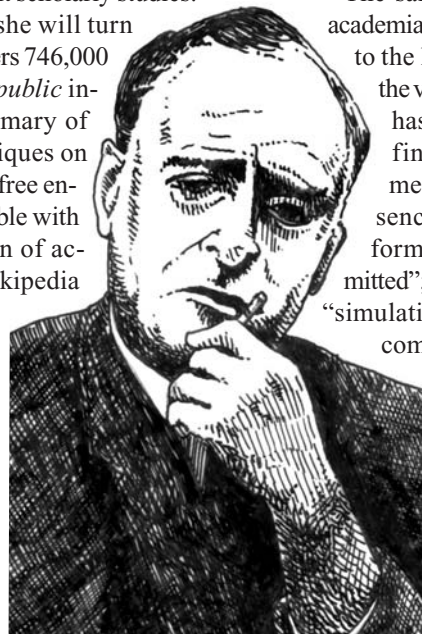
and unwieldy. We live in an information and communication age, and are blessed to be doing so. Still, it is worth looking at some of the information we are getting, and some of the communication we are doing.

Now the average college sophomore researching a paper on, say, Plato's *Republic*, is unlikely to start by ransacking the shelves of relevant scholarly studies. Odds are that he or she will turn to Google, which offers 746,000 references to the *Republic* including a brisk summary of the book and its critiques on Wikipedia, the Net's free encyclopedia. The trouble with this is not a question of accuracy (although Wikipedia has been notorious for errata), but of superficiality. The electronic version of *Cliffs Notes* adds a "Resource Center" that contains "books, websites, and more for further study." But further study is the last thing on the mind of our sopho-

more, whose objective is writing a term paper without doing any actual spade-work. Perhaps the professor will insist on deeper digging. Academics are often overscheduled, however. They have lots of papers to mark, and many a contemporary student has received a "gentleman's (or lady's) C" without bothering to read the original texts.

The same holds true outside academia. Researchers once went to the library; now they go to the virtual library. Webster's has been forced to redefine *virtual*. Formerly it meant "being such in essence or effect though not formally recognized or admitted"; at present it also means "simulating on a computer—or computer network—print or *virtual* books."

There is nothing wrong with showing the pages of a book on a computer screen. Often the desired passage comes up instantly; it supplies the necessary quote or reference and we need



MARSHALL MCLUHAN

nothing more. Yet something is missing: the serendipity only an authentic, well-equipped library can offer—the happy, accidental discovery of out-of-print volumes, forgotten pamphlets and periodicals that can't be found on the Net. Indeed, one of the most effective research engines, Lexis-Nexis, advertises that it offers news stories from the majority of English-language periodicals worldwide back to 1986, and that there are a number of articles ranging as far back as the mid-1970s. The mid-1970s! The Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter years—or as it is known to Gen X-ers, the Jurassic Era.

In the past, magazines like *Time* employed people to compile scrapbooks of nine New York newspapers. Examining the 1930s, for example, writers could peruse the sports section of the Communist *Daily Worker* as well as the harrumphing, Roosevelt-hating editorials of Hearst's red-bannered *Journal-American*. Try finding those on the Net. Try finding those in the *Time* library. They've all vanished into warehouses. If the material cannot be called up from cyberspace, forget about it.

**T**HEN THERE IS the area of communication. McLuhan's romantic notion of "Spaceship Earth" implies an underlying belief in the essential sameness of humanity once you get past ethnicity, race, nationalism, and all the other walls that keep us apart. But those barriers have proved immeasurably high and incalculably strong.

Exhibit A: The People's Republic of China. That nation brims with techies who know how to construct or copy any electronic device. Many of them have cell phones with built-in cameras, capable of recording human rights violations on the spot. Visiting journalists carry the same devices. Have the electronic media

stifled the totalitarians? Not at all. In fact, they recently *boosted* the Chinese leaders with their intense coverage of the carefully orchestrated Beijing Olympics.

In the far reaches of Afghanistan, or wherever Osama bin Laden is keeping himself, the terrorists of Al Qaeda have no trouble getting their film and radio messages out to the world via the most modern devices. They understand how computers work, and how the cable news networks can be manipulated. But their fundamentalist Islamic beliefs remain intact, as if they were living, dressing and murdering in the 14th century. So much for the similarity of those aboard Spaceship Earth.

As for communication on a more local level, all you have to do is take a bus or enter a railway car in any major city to see what has happened to conversation. The aural attack begins upon entrance. It doesn't come from the hum of the motor, or from the artists of hip-hop leaking from someone's iPod, or from the chatter of straphangers. It issues from the voices of passengers on their cell phones. To some, these little phones have been a blessing; they can schedule meetings, conclude deals, let their spouses know they are going to be late for supper. But for the majority of talkers the device is merely an extension of the ego, a chance to yammer about inconsequential things to people a few streets away at the top of their voices. Rather than bring riders together, cell phones have become a public nuisance separating callers from their resentful fellow commuters.

Electronic insensitivity is not restricted to cell users. In *Totally Wired, What Teens and Tweens Are Really Doing Online* (2007), Anastasia Goodstein discusses the neologisms "cyberbullying" and "flaming." The former refers to the intimidation of a chosen victim by other students, via computer. "Instead of a clique not letting a girl sit with them at

lunch," Goodstein reports, "a group of friends can decide to keep her off everyone's buddy lists." Just as teachers may "never suspect that it's the 'good girls' who may be tormenting their peers, cyberbullies are often kids known for being 'on the right track,' or the kids you would least expect."

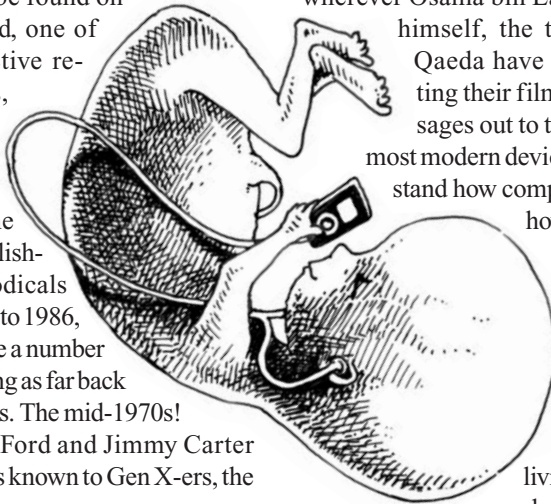
"Flaming" is a synonym for a barrage of insults conveyed electronically. Teens have always fought with each other, but "something about the detached disembodied nature of communicating online has contributed to the explosion and rampant flaming that often happens between teens." All too soon the foul language goes public and "what's up bitch, ho . . . becomes normal in the spoken lexicon."

In "September 1, 1939," a poem written almost 70 years ago, W.H. Auden showed more prescience than many a futurist contemplating an E-world.

*Faces along the bar  
Cling to their average day:  
The lights must never go out,  
The music must always play,  
All the conventions conspire  
To make this fort assume  
The furniture of home;  
Lest we should see where we are,  
Lost in a haunted wood.*

Case in point: the crowds of hypnotized pedestrians sporting their ubiquitous earbuds or noise-canceling headphones. The buds tend to be worn by younger Americans connected to a torrent of Top Ten albums and singles. That way they never have to experience the sound of silence or the occasional inspired thought. Older citizens are more likely to use noise-canceling headsets plugged into Right-wing AM radio talk shows like those of Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly, which turn the serious business of politics into mass entertainment.

**T**HOSE are not the worst features of the electronic global village, though. In a real village, it is possible to pull the curtains to deter prying eyes, and to lock the doors against intruders. In the



global village, despite virtual “firewalls” and other software to protect the computer user, hackers work 24/7 at trying to invade personal security. The illegal industry has given birth to the term “phishing” to describe what criminals do when they pose as representing a legitimate concern, such as a bank, to extract information about checking accounts, credit cards and Social Security numbers.

In his chilling book, *Database Nation: The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (2000), Simon Garfinkel forecasts that “over the next 50 years, we will see new kinds of threats to privacy that don’t find their roots in totalitarianism, but in capitalism, the free market, advanced technology, and the unbridled exchange of information.” Actually, they are already here; two years ago hackers broke into the Pentagon database and tapped names and information about thousands of people who have attended its conferences.

Beyond privacy lies another technological worry. Few adults have bothered to investigate the most ubiquitous electronic toys in the world: video games. The creation and production of them has become a billion dollar industry; it now grosses more than movies and DVDs combined. The images presented by some of these games can be extraordinarily realistic; they can also be extraordinarily brutal. Used in moderation, it is said, they may sharpen motor skills and coordination. The trouble is, they are seldom used in moderation.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recently issued a paper entitled “Children and Video Games: Playing with Violence.” It observes that although “some games have educational content, many of the most popular emphasize negative themes and promote:

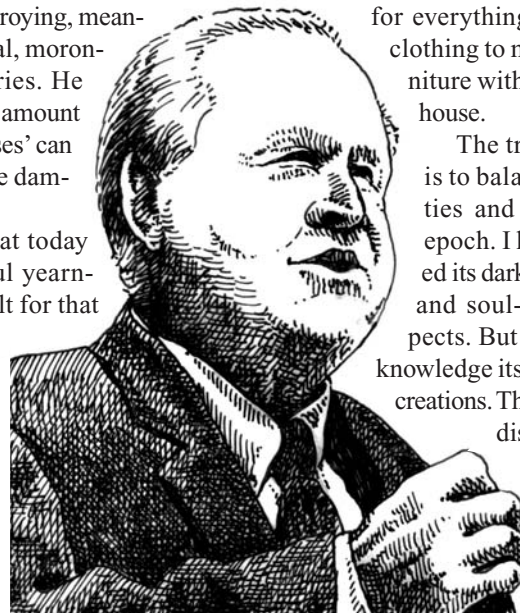
- “• The killing of people or animals.
- “• The use and abuse of drugs and alcohol.
- “• Criminal behavior, disrespect for authority and the law.
- “• Sexual exploitation and violence toward women.
- “• Racial, sexual and gender stereotypes.

“• Foul language, obscenities and obscene gestures.”

The paper goes on to warn that “studies of children exposed to violence have shown that they can become ‘immune’ or numb to the horror of violence, imitate the violence they see, and show more aggressive behavior with greater exposure to violence.” Some children “accept violence as a way to handle problems.” In addition, “children with emotional, behavioral and learning problems may be more influenced by violent images.”

**N**ONE OF THE ABOVE should be a surprise—historically, new inventions bring with them curses as well as blessings. In its way, the information and communication era is not very different from the industrial age. When that got into full swing, the poet William Blake condemned the “dark, Satanic mills” rising in England’s green and pleasant land. Nearly two centuries later, in the bestselling *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), economist E.F. Schumacher wrote of “soul-destroying, meaningless, mechanical, moronic work” in factories. He concluded that “no amount of ‘bread and circuses’ can compensate for the damage done.”

The irony is that today there is a powerful yearning in the Rust Belt for that very labor. At one time the assembly lines at Ford, General Motors and Chrysler provided employment and benefits for hundreds of thousands, now laid off or retrained for other, less remunerative jobs. They are represented by weaker unions than the United Auto Workers—if they are represented at all—and long for the days that will not return.



**RUSH LIMBAUGH**

The same holds true in the new millennium. With sound reason, the critics (and I count myself among them) warn of the wired and wireless generation’s excesses: the invasion of intellectual space, the clueless scholarship, the student malice, and the decline of attention. Still, this age offers some exceptional technological benisons.

You are reading a copy of an intellectual magazine that only exists online—something that was inconceivable a short while ago. This suggests you have a computer and probably a printer, labor-saving machines that have changed the way we all work and live. Chances are you own, or will soon acquire, a digital camera, thereby ending the time you spent going to and from the drugstore to have your film developed. And if you never want to get lost again, you can buy a GPS. The Global Positioning System is a satellite-based navigation instrument that determines a car’s position anywhere on earth, and tells you how to reach your destination over the most convenient roads, day or night. Scores of other electronic aids allow us to save hours, reach

our loved ones with ease, and shop for everything from food to clothing to medicine to furniture without leaving the house.

The trick, as always, is to balance the liabilities and virtues of our epoch. I have enumerated its dark Satanic threats and soul-destroying aspects. But I must also acknowledge its life-enhancing creations. They have reduced distances, opened doors to the unfamiliar, and made life easier for a lot of us. At what cost, no one can say—

not yet, anyway. It may well be that our children and grandchildren will look back at this flawed information and communication age with nostalgia and envy.

## The War That Backfired

By Gavriel Rosenfeld

**T**HE DUST JACKET of Mark Mazower's powerful new book, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (Penguin, 726 pp., \$39.95), provocatively says it "offers a chilling vision" of the world that might have been had the Nazis won World War II. This eye-catching declaration is probably meant to appeal to fans of the increasingly popular genre of speculative fiction known as alternate history. In reality, *Hitler's Empire* is a traditional work containing little counterfactual speculation. Nevertheless, its underlying thesis has important allohistorical implications, and it convincingly shows how the very ideological principles that led the Nazis to unleash World War II ultimately torpedoed their chances of winning it.

In seeking the origins of the Nazi effort to establish a "New Order" via military conquest, Mazower identifies important lines of continuity to earlier eras of German history. As far back as the 19th-century *Kaiserreich*, nationalists dreamed of creating a "Greater Germany" by colonizing the territories Prussia had seized from Poland in the late 18th century. But because Berlin was unable to persuade a sufficient number of the country's citizens to settle the largely Polish lands—and the Junker landowning elite remained addicted to cheap Polish labor—the dream had to be deferred.

It did not disappear, however. With the outbreak of World War I, the yearning for expansion intensified. Especially following the Bolshevik Revolution and Russia's collapse on the Eastern front in 1917, Germany rushed to appropriate wide swaths of Russian territory and engaged in limited population resettlement projects in the Baltic borderlands. Although it ultimately lost the War in 1918, Mazower shows that defeat only served to further heighten the desire to expand. The fact that

nearly 10 million Germans were suddenly living as minorities in newly formed nations (Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine), and that the Western powers refused to allow the new Austria to reunite with Germany, led many Germans to complain bitterly that their national rights were being ignored. This resentment was easily exploited by the Nazis, who proceeded to racialize the imperialist dreams of the past in their plans for the future.

After seizing power in 1933, Hitler set about realizing the goal of a Greater Germany through his notorious brand of diplomatic brinkmanship, annexing Austria and the German-inhabited Czech region called the Sudetenland. But it was with the Third Reich's invasion of Poland in 1939 that the murderous logic underpinning the Nazis' imperialist vision became fully visible. Mazower stresses that their brutal treatment of Poland stemmed as much from poor planning as from their racist ideology. When they took over the western portion of Poland known as the Warthegau, they had no clear idea what they would do with its 9 million Poles and 600,000 Jews (only 10 per cent of the population was German). Under the guidance of the SS, though, they quickly decided to expel its non-German inhabitants and replace them with ethnic Germans.

But the Nazis, too, were unable to find enough Germans to settle the area. Moreover, they created massive difficulties

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for themselves in the process of using terror to evict the Poles and Jews from the Warthegau. The policy only shifted the “problem” to the adjacent zone of the General Government, whose governor, Hans Frank, strenuously objected to his territory being used as a dumping ground for racial “inferiors.” During the ensuing chaos, Nazi officials frequently worked at cross purposes, with the racially driven SS insisting on deporting the very same Polish laborers the Party hoped to exploit in order to avert a looming labor shortage. The fate of the Jews at this time also hung in the balance, with most being gradually confined to what were supposed to be “temporary” ghettos.

**T**HE CONFLICT within the Nazi administrative apparatus was a chronic feature of the occupation regime. Mazower does not mention that bureaucratic bedlam was an endemic feature of the Third Reich’s governing structure even in peacetime, as historians like Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen have long emphasized. Rivalries between state and Party agencies, between moderates and radicals, between pragmatists and ideologues, impeded the efficiency of the regime from the beginning. Yet the author is right to emphasize that the eruption of war aggravated those rivalries.

Particularly with respect to the goal of Germanization, Nazi officials did not exactly cooperate with one another. The *Gauleiter* of Lorraine, Josef Bürckel, deported some 60,000 French speakers without first subjecting them to racial screening, thereby angering the SS, which deemed many of the deportees to be potentially worth integrating into the German *Volk*. Meanwhile, the *Gauleiter* of Danzig-West Prussia, Albert Forster, subverted the SS’ rigid system for classifying Poles with possible German heritage by including a huge number of “mixed Class 3s” (locals who were most likely of Kashubian background) for Germanization. Mazower argues that both men’s decisions were largely motivated by their wanting to keep the SS from gaining undue influences in their administrative districts. These examples make clear that the fate of local populations was as often decided by the internal jockeying for power as ideology.

Unfortunately, things got worse for the population of Eastern Europeans with the invasion of the Soviet Union. Here as well the contradictions of the Nazis’ expansionist vision were on full display. While they were frighteningly efficient at conquering territory, they were incompetent at ruling it. Like other historians before him, Mazower maintains that the Nazis could have ensured the loyalty of the conquered peoples of the Baltic states and Ukraine

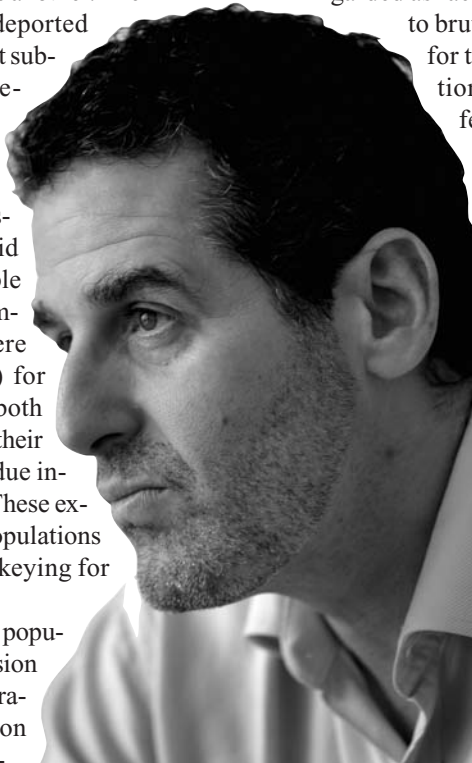
by exploiting their anti-Bolshevik feelings. The Wehrmacht, he notes, was widely welcomed as a liberating force. Yet instead of following the lead of Alfred Rosenberg, who as the head of the *Ostministerium* tried to organize these nations into a coalition of anti-Communist states, the Nazis followed SS chief Heinrich Himmler’s racist notion of Germanization through massive population transfers.

In 1942, the SS approved a monomaniacal scheme known as *Generalplan Ost* that envisioned the forced expulsion of some 50 million Slavs from Eastern Europe to make way for ethnic Germans. The plan was never implemented due to the worsening military situation, but Mazower points out that it never would have worked because there simply were not enough Germans to settle the land Hitler had conquered. Germans could not be relocated from the Reich itself without depopulating it and necessitating the importation of foreign laborers (which would have undermined the SS’s goal of a racially purified *Volksgemeinschaft*). Mazower sees this contradiction as a classic example of “imperial overstretch,” a concept historian Paul Kennedy introduced in the late 1980s to explain the ultimate demise of imperial regimes. The fact that of the nearly 250 million people under Nazi rule only 90 million were German, shows that the Nazis had overextended themselves.

Mazower goes on to say this untenable situation explains many of the Nazis’ atrocities against civilians. In trying to run a hastily acquired, far-flung empire of people who were regarded as racially inferior they unhesitatingly resorted to brute force. It was hard enough, for example, for the Nazis to feed Germany’s own population during the War without worrying about feeding the millions of POWs and European civilians who had come under their control. The Nazis’ decision to let many of their charges starve to death (forcing Ukrainian peasants, for example, to deliver large quotas of grain while they themselves starved) reflected a combination of racism and poor planning.

*Hitler’s Empire* reaches somewhat in arguing that the 1942 food crisis accelerated the decision to kill the Jews of Poland (the Wannsee Conference of the previous year had already settled their fate). But he convincingly demonstrates that even in the occupied nations of Western Europe, such as France and Belgium, the difficulty of feeding the population led to strikes, declining coal production, Nazi repression, and growing popular disaffection with the occupation. That the Nazis had to increase

their “recruitment” (read: kidnapping) of foreign workers to fill the Reich’s growing labor shortage—caused by the conscription of most of the able-bodied male population—further



**MARK MAZOWER**

underscores the contradictions of the Nazis' imperialistic dreams. Under the direction of the plenipotentiary for labor, Fritz Sauckel, 20 per cent of Germany's labor pool (some 7 million workers) was of foreign origin by 1944.

The place of the Holocaust within the Nazis' broader imperial project is an important, albeit somewhat less satisfying, chapter in Mazower's analysis. Presumably to enhance the readability of his narrative, he largely avoids discussing historiographical debates. He addresses neither the long-standing exchanges between functionalists and intentionalists, nor the more recent German scholarship produced since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of Eastern European archives. Thus his otherwise substantial treatment of the Holocaust (50 pages) will leave many readers grasping for answers.

Mazower supports the view that the Holocaust essentially grew out of Hitler's desire to racially reorganize Eastern Europe. In doing so, he elevates "rational" (if immoral) factors above ideological ones, specifically anti-Semitism. This fails to explain why the Nazis sought out Jews in remote areas (Greece, Norway, the Channel Islands) that lay outside of their targeted zones for colonization. But the author is ultimately less interested in the origins of the Final Solution than in why the Nazi-occupied nations of Europe participated in it. He skillfully argues that the inconsistency of policy (many countries vacillated in surrendering their Jews, deporting some and not others) reflected their mistrust of the occupier. Especially as the War began to shift against the Nazis, the Jews became jealously guarded symbols of national sovereignty.

**J**EWES WERE HARDLY the only Europeans whose fate hung in the balance during the years of Nazi occupation. In several chapters, Mazower surveys the complicated history of collaboration and resistance in a range of countries. In France, where the Nazis initially tried a lighter touch than they employed in Eastern Europe, they had mixed success. Their cultural diplomacy appealed to intellectuals such as Céline and Jean Cocteau, who displayed enthusiasm for the regime. The Nazis also received cooperation from police officials like René Bousquet, who helped them round up foreign Jews. Yet, over time, the increasingly punitive tenor of Nazi rule began to backfire. After the leveling of Marseilles' expansive Vieux-Port neighborhood and the deportation of 40,000 of its inhabitants, many ordinary Frenchmen and women turned against the Nazis, especially after they increasingly began to rely on the hated Right-wing paramilitary *miliciens* of Joseph Darnand to preserve order.

Armed resistance was frequently the response, not only in France but in every European country where the Nazis had a presence. Especially as the War began to go against the Third Reich in 1943, partisan bands emerged and tried to attack the occupiers. But more often than not the chief result was asymmetrical reprisals against civilians. Mazower marshals nause-

ating statistics to show the Nazis' brutal attempts to suppress partisan activity. To cite only one, while killing some 30,000 partisans in Belorussia the Nazis also killed some 350,000 civilians (more than a 10-1 ratio). Though the statistics were less severe in Western Europe, infamous massacres, some of which have faded from Western memory, occurred there too. Again to cite only one, the 1944 killing of 770 people in the Italian Apennine village of Marzabotto left no doubt that the Nazis were prepared to use excessively repressive measures to preserve their rule.

Mazower does not merely show that Europeans suffered under the Nazis; he points out how and why more than a few of the nations allied to them aped their imperialist policies: Hungarians pursued a program of Magyarization in lands seized from Yugoslavia; Romanians plundered Transnistria, taken from Ukraine; Bulgarians expelled Greeks; and Croats expelled Serbs. All of these cases illustrate how the German assault against the interwar policy of guaranteeing protection to national minorities ushered in the postwar preference for national homogeneity. The new principle led to a reordering of the European map, now punctuated by the expulsion of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Baltics, plus the reshuffling of postwar populations involving Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia. The author goes so far as to link these events to the postwar population transfers between India and Pakistan, and, more debatably, to the flight and expulsion of Palestinians from territories in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. Indeed, his otherwise incisive analytical approach begins to verge on the tendentious when he laconically equates postwar Israeli settlement strategies with the ideas of SS theorists who helped draft Himmler's *Generalplan Ost* colonization plan. This misstep notwithstanding, Mazower's conclusion makes clear that the Nazis' imperialistic aspirations paved the way for postwar decolonization.

In the end, Mazower's compelling analysis of the contradictions underpinning the Nazis' dream of *Lebensraum* impressively demonstrates that the Nazis were destined to lose World War II. But he soberly reminds us that, inefficient as the Nazis may have been at running an empire, they were brutally effective at suppressing resistance to it. The resistance movements that emerged in every European country the Nazis occupied were not responsible for freeing the Continent from Nazi rule. Rather, it was the Soviet Union's insurmountable advantages of manpower and materiel (and Stalin's ability to ruthlessly employ both) that ensured the Nazis' defeat. Yet even the Soviet Union's success was not inevitable. All armchair historians know how close the Soviets came to being crushed in the early weeks of Operation Barbarossa. And military historians have outlined numerous scenarios showing that Hitler could have overcome Stalin. For this reason, even as *Hitler's Empire* explains how the paradoxes that lay at the core of the Nazis' dream of a Greater Germany contributed to their defeat, we remain chilled by the thought that, given slightly different circumstances, they might have triumphed.

# Responding to Malthus

## The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor, Death in the Tropics, and the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth

By Steven Stoll  
Hill and Wang.  
210 pp. \$24.00.

Reviewed by  
**Paul Davidson**

Editor, "Journal of Post Keynesian Economics"; author, "John Maynard Keynes"

**E**CONOMISTS maintain that human progress requires continuous growth in aggregate consumption. Steven Stoll, a professor of history at Fordham University, strongly disagrees. In his view that notion is, as the title of his new book puts it, *The Great Delusion* of our time.

"Economic growth," Stoll asserts, "is a measure of *throughput* . . . the capacity of a system to transfer raw material from environments to consumers through a widening process of production." He sees disaster around the corner as consumption per se by an expanding world population results in mountains of waste that is buried in overloaded landfills, depletes our planet's limited natural resources and destroys its ecosystems.

His warning is of course not new. As early as 1798, in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Thomas Robert Malthus famously argued that while the number of people on the earth would grow geometrically, the production of food and other necessities of life could only advance arithmetically. Consequently, instead of society progressing toward a world of plenty obtained through new tools provided by capitalists, society was condemned to a losing struggle between mouths to feed and an increasingly insufficient bounty from Mother Nature. Yet 210 years after Malthus wrote his *Essay* population has swelled enormously, and in most developed nations the nutritional problem is not the lack of food, it is obesity!

"Disturbing as it sounds," Stoll responds, "growth on the scale known to industrial societies over the last two centuries is a historically exceptional condition" that is no longer with us. But he does not make his case by presenting the kind of worrying statistical analyses and mathematical models put forward by organizations like the Club of Rome in the 1970s. Instead, he recounts the experience of a 19th-century German engineer, John Adolphus Etzler, the "mad inventor" of the book's subtitle.

Etzler believed that innovation and technical progress could harness the universal abundance of Mother Nature and help mankind permanently eliminate class conflict and poverty. Stoll discusses the inventions to increase production that Etzler patented. Designed to be propelled by such unlimited energy sources as wind power, sunshine and wave motion, they were gigantic failures. Nevertheless, Etzler was convinced the wind, sun and sea could provide all the energy needed "to afford a sufficiency for all our wants" because "no material is consumed."

Backed by a wealthy businessman named Conrad Stollmeyer, Etzler attempted to develop a Utopian Socialist Society in Venezuela. That South American country's abundant sunlight and fertile land, he was convinced, could be made a virtual Garden of Eden where everyone "would live like royalty . . . and the ability to consume that defined the rich would belong to everyone." The result was a disaster, with many of the participants in Etzler's Venezuelan experiment dying in the tropics.

The lesson Stoll wants us to learn from the mad inventor's biography is clear: Despite our optimism that we can harness all the energy necessary to increase production, we cannot fool Mother Na-

ture into permitting a perpetual continuous growth in consumption.

**I**NDULGING in a bit of satire, Stoll titles his last chapter "The Seven Billion Billionaires," referring to the almost 7 billion people who currently inhabit our planet. He cautions his readers that in the 20th century there were others who, à la Etzler, promoted a vision of a future where continuous economic growth would assure prosperity and progress for all mankind.

One example he cites is R. Buckminster Fuller, inventor of the Dymaxion house. Stoll suggests that, in 1938, Fuller chided his readers for not realizing the universe is so big that one's sense of the possible has to be enlarged. By "employing an I-have-seen-the-future language that might have come right out of Etzler," Stoll says, Fuller predicted "industrial changes greater than any in history are at hand." He claimed that in the near future we would be free of scarcity and, with a global population at the time of approximately 4 billion,

Fuller wrote: "We have 4 billion billionaires aboard our planet, as accounted by *real wealth*." Such optimists, Stoll complains, possessed "some idea or habit of mind [that] prevented them from seeing our economy as part of the environment."

To illustrate the disaster we are currently facing, Stoll takes up the problem of oil availability in the 21st century. He states:

"Fossil fuels underwrite our material lives. . . . Yet if petroleum keeps rising over \$100 per barrel, our perfectly ordinary, highly dispersed, energy-intensive economic geography will become unworkable. Oil is not simply implicated in everything we call growth—there has never been growth without it. . . . Yet even though the end of its production is in sight, there is no substitute for oil—*nothing* stands ready to



**STEVEN STOLL**

perfectly ordinary, highly dispersed, energy-intensive economic geography will become unworkable. Oil is not simply implicated in everything we call growth—there has never been growth without it. . . . Yet even though the end of its production is in sight, there is no substitute for oil—*nothing* stands ready to

replace even 10 per cent of present consumption.”

But the history of economic growth in the Tennessee Valley is tied to water power, not fossil fuels. In France, nuclear power provides approximately 80 per cent of the electricity generated and is certainly an important element in the country’s economic growth. If oil is too expensive, then after a period of transition other sources of energy—whose cost of safe delivery exceeded that of oil when it was \$10 to \$30 per barrel—can, and will, come into play. The author’s enthusiasm for a Malthusian constraint on economic growth has clouded his view of the historical growth of some nations or regions where alternatives are already inexpensive enough to replace significant quantities of oil use.

Stoll tries to put a final nail in the coffin of growth advocates by attacking the analysis in Benjamin M. Friedman’s book, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (2005). Friedman finds that rising incivility and intolerance is associated with a flattening of the Gross Domestic Product and incomes. Stoll counters that during the booming 1980s and ’90s the lives of the poor did not significantly improve, while the detachment of business “executives from any duty to the public weal has resulted in spectacular scandals that have left thousands without secure retirement funds.” From this he concludes: “If growth does not result in social equality and the reduction of poverty, it abdicates its single social justification.”

**A**T THIS POINT Stoll appears to be questioning John F. Kennedy’s contention that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” which in the 1960s was probably true. But since the 1980s, with the start of the movement to deregulate markets and promote self-interest unfettered by government interference, the problem of increasing income distribution inequality has arisen even in periods of economic growth. Does that mean we should abandon economic growth, or does it suggest that government must constrain self-interest actions in the marketplace that inflict socially undesirable results on segments of the population? Shouldn’t government insure that all citizens have some share in any economic growth that occurs?

At the end of *The Great Delusion* Stoll gives us his solution to the Malthusian disaster he foresees: “Eliminate waste in production. Make cars lighter to save fuel. Replace petroleum-burning engines with hydrogen-burning fuel cells. Better yet, redesign the factory . . . to acknowledge that all production is a subsystem of the larger biophysical system of the earth. Make its materials recyclable and its by-products ecologically absorbable so that manufacturing becomes environmentally benign. *It is called industrial ecology, and it has been waiting for its moment for half a century. That moment has arrived.*” (Italics mine. P.D.)

Does Stoll’s concept of industrial ecology mean changing the way things are produced while still permitting total output and consumption to grow, or limiting total output and consumption globally to current levels, or requiring a reduction in total output and consumption so that the almost 7 billion people populating the planet must do with less? Stoll provides no answer to this question.

## A History of Hysteria

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### The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch-Hunting in the Western World

By John Demos

Viking.

318 pp. \$25.95.

Reviewed by

**Stephen J. Whitfield**

Professor of American studies,  
Brandeis University

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**T**HIS SUMMER New York’s Dicapo Opera Theater revived Robert Ward’s 1960 Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Crucible*, inspired by Arthur Miller’s frequently mounted eponymous 1953 play. Miller sought to compare the panic caused by the 1692-93 witchcraft trials in Salem, Massachusetts to the contemporaneous Red Scare. That the drama premiered on Broadway while Senator Joseph R. McCarthy was still on his rampage, or that the opera was composed just four years after his death, is understand-

able. But what accounts for the enduring impact of both works beyond artistic excellence? The answer, I think, is an abiding curiosity about the history of witchcraft.

John Demos is no novice to the field. In 1960, as a first-year graduate student in American history at Harvard, he wrote a term paper on the subject that became a published article. His 1982 book, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*, drew deftly on anthropology to illumine outbreaks of hysteria and won the Bancroft Prize.

As the Samuel Knight Professor of History at Yale, Demos has cultivated throughout his career a special interest in the intersections of family dynamics and village arrangements, gender relations, and religious devotion in colonial New England. Even historians whose expertise lies elsewhere have long admired the felicity of his prose as much as his ability to pick up psychic signals emitted from the archives. Very few scholars are better equipped to trace the historical role of witch-hunting and, through command of the sources, to inform the general reader. (*The Enemy Within* includes a 10-page “Bibliographic Commentary” but has no footnotes.)

A passion to remind us of the needless persecution, torture and death caused by false accusations and outbursts of paranoia surely animates Demos’ synthesis. His chief concern, though, is scholarly. Witch-hunting has been episodic rather than a constant in human affairs. So why did this phenomenon occur in some towns but not in adjacent villages? Why did these panics break out in the German states and in northeastern France and in New England more frequently than in, say, Ireland or southern Italy or Virginia?

That the Book of Exodus mandated death (“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”) has also meant that hysteria has been characteristic of the *Western* world, an artifact of Christendom. But the historiographical question lingers: What have been the distinctive geographical and chronological features of witch-hunting? It was neither pervasive nor unending. The danger increased for those living in what are now Germany, Switzerland and the southern part of the Netherlands. Res-

idents of Poland or northern Italy or Scotland were somewhat safer. Spaniards and Swedes were even more secure. Witch-hunting was most commonly unleashed between 1580 and 1650, with the two decades between 1610 and 1630 being the worst. But witchcraft trials were conducted with great intensity in Bavaria, Demos points out, until about 1750 (near the peak of the Age of Enlightenment).

In Europe, four out of five victims were women, a disproportion the author attributes to misogyny. This might have stemmed from the fears associated with the primal experience of birth and the dependency upon the magical aura of maternity. Or resentment and jealousy might have been directed at widows whose economic independence sometimes spurred self-assertiveness, which activated the reassertion of patriarchal power. No single explanation can cover all or even most of the cases, nor does Demos offer any fully applicable theoretical model. But his conjectures in particular instances are at least tenable, and represent sensible interventions in the debates that have swirled around the disparate eruptions of witch-hunting.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, however, that Demos has organized this book according to his own predilections. Although Europe was far more afflicted by the crazes than the American colonies, for example, only the first of its four sections is set in the Old World—in the medieval and early modern periods. The second section, entitled “Early America,” opens with a chapter set in Windsor, Connecticut in 1654. Another chapter provides an overview of the phenomenon in the colonies, spanning from Jamestown to Salem (1607-1692). A third profiles a particular victim of mistrust, the “haughty” Mary Parsons. All three chapters of the next section are lavished on Salem. Included is a judicious but scathing portrait of the learned author of *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, Cotton Mather.

In his final section, Demos attempts to bring the story up to date. The *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), the “handbook” of unspeakable actions witch-hunters relied on, was abandoned centuries ago. But the eerie work, which Demos observes is “drenched” in misogyny, is still

in print and available from Amazon. Moreover, he argues, the countersubversive impulse has survived; fears of betrayal and conspiracy continue to lurk. American history has been dotted with all sorts of scares—against Masons, against anarchists, against Communists, to name merely a few. If a modern sequel to *Malleus Maleficarum* were to be nominated, it might be that canonical text of the countersubversive imagination *Masters of Deceit*, J. Edgar Hoover’s 1958 bestseller on Communism.

A weakness of *The Enemy Within* is its oscillating between the synoptic and the local, between overviews and cameos. Sometimes it opts for trial records, other times for miniature biographies. These variations are effectively presented, yet readers may find them disconcerting. Demos evidently gambled that a mix of dramatic incidents and literary elegance would compensate for a lack of thematic rigor. Instead, what he has put together is ultimately less than the sum of its parts.

The one that stands out, “The Most Famous Witch-Hunt of All, 1692-93,” comes appropriately at the center of *The Enemy Within*. At 58 pages it is the longest chapter, and besides portraying the events in Essex County, Massachusetts, he illustrates the way chroniclers have tried to explain the whole mad phenomenon.

Demos shows how feminism, pharmacology, epidemiology, and the stagecraft of Arthur Miller have been enlisted in the effort to probe what triggered and eventually calmed Salem’s suspicious minds. His own conclusion focuses on two factors, “rising capitalism and Indian terror.” Since they were hardly unique to Salem in the late 17th century, the mystery is not dispelled.

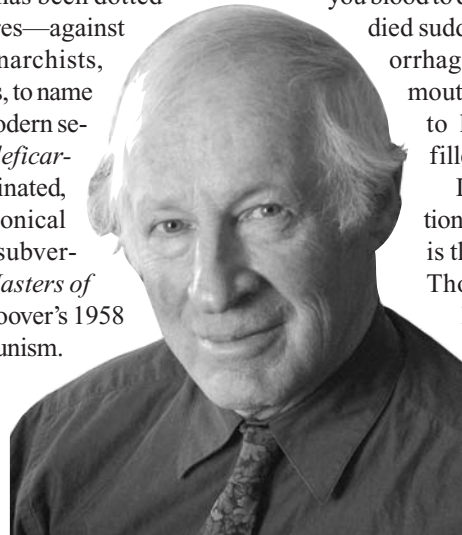
Perhaps not even the intervention of a just deity can be excluded as helping to bring the craze to a halt. When Reverend Nicholas Noyes, the austere town minister who championed the trials, urged

Sarah Good to confess on Gallows Hill before her hanging, she retorted: “I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood to drink.” In 1718 Noyes died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage, which caused his mouth (at least according to local gossip) to be filled with blood.

Demos’ closing section, “Modern America,” is the least satisfactory. Though our courts no longer permit the introduction of spectral evidence, he maintains that the psychodynamics of witch-hunting have not been extinguished. He also has an entire

chapter on the anti-Masonic movement in the country’s early period. But two crucial facts undermine his argument: There were no witches then (in the sense of allies of the Devil), while the Masons included the likes of George Washington, Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay. Further, the author himself says, “Masonic lodges are, of course, an exclusively male preserve.”

In addition to the fear of Masonic power, Demos writes, the later scares in American public life were commonly associated with warnings of a “potentially apocalyptic menace”—the conspiracy earlier witch-hunters ascribed to the cosmic power of the Devil. If so, then, why end *The Enemy Within* with a clearly local, though Massachusetts-based, scandal? The 1984 events in Malden were fueled by grotesque, fantastic accusations against the owners of a day-care center. They were convicted and imprisoned thanks to testimonies of abuse given by children who had been rehearsed and coached. Was the injustice visited upon the family that ran the Fells Acres Day School a vestige of witch-hunting? The trail back to Salem seems too sinuous, the parallels not very persuasive. But what persists is how thin, in a crisis, are the membranes intended to protect us from the rancor of our neighbors.



JOHN DEMOS

# On Fiction

## A Tragicomic Meditation on Old Age

By Brooke Allen

A NEW NOVEL BY DAVID LODGE is one of life's few reliable pleasures. Beginning with *The Picturegoers* (1960), Lodge's 14 novels have collectively presented a wryly humorous portrait of provincial academics blundering through the social upheavals that transformed Britain in the second half of the 20th century. *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965) gave some idea of what it was like to be young, horny, middle-class, and Catholic at the moment when the combined forces of Vatican II and the Pill were shaking off centuries of repression and convention. *Changing Places* (1975) parodied both British and American academic fashion by contrasting two professors of literature, Philip Swallow of Rummidge University in England (based on Birmingham, where Lodge taught for many years), and Morris Zapp, the superstar literary theorist of an American college named Plotinus in the imaginary state of Euphoria (Berkeley, obviously). *Small World* (1984) detailed the further adventures of these two and others as they winged round the globe from one literary conference to another to another.

Lodge's latest work, *Deaf Sentence* (Viking, 294 pp., \$25.95), is gentler than the aforementioned and cannot be called a comic novel, though it is very funny. Rather, it is one of those meditations on impending old age that many writers feel moved to tackle. Late middle age is a very distinct moment in life's journey, the point where death is suddenly no longer an abstract concept that can safely be ignored but an all too real and proximate event that must be acknowledged and mentally prepared for. The death of one's parents removes the buffer between oneself and eternity. Retirement and the departure of the kids provide unaccustomed swaths of time when the thoughts of eternity we have comfortably held at bay during busy decades come crowding in. Loss of the sex drive is both traumatic and sardonic, turning a virile man into a ludicrous *senex* overnight.

Lodge captures the humor and the pathos in all this by making his hero, like himself, deaf—not profoundly deaf but mid-level “hard of hearing.” Desmond Bates, a retired professor of linguistics at a university in the north of England, understands very well that “Deafness is comic, as blindness is tragic,” and is entirely conscious of the foolish aspect he presents. His riffs on the indignities and inconveniences of the condition are brilliant. Hearing aids create more problems than they solve, while infrared sound systems in theaters make it seem “as if you are listening to the performance through a telephone on stage that has been left off the hook.” “Theater-in-the-round is equally hopeless. . . . It's like listening to a play through a door which keeps opening and shutting.”

There also are “those conversations in which your interlocutor says something that sounds like a quotation from a Dadaist poem, or one of Chomsky's impossible sentences, and you say ‘What?’ or ‘I beg your pardon?’ and they repeat their words, which make a banal sense the second time round.

“‘The pastime of the dance went to pot,’ Sylvia Cooper seemed to say, ‘so we spent most of the time in our shit, the cows’ in-laws finding they stuttered.’

“‘What?’ I said.

“‘I said, the last time we went to France it was so hot we spent most of the time in our gîte, cowering indoors behind the shutters.’

“‘Oh, hot, was it?’ I said. ‘That must have been the summer of 2003.’

“‘Yes, we seared our arses on bits of plate, but soiled my cubism, I’m afraid.’

“‘I’m sorry?’

“‘We were near Carcassonne. A pretty place, but spoiled by tourism, I’m afraid.’”

And here is Desmond in the changing room at a public pool,

“lined with lockers that on the insertion of a one-pound coin would allow the key to be turned and extracted, attached to a rubber band you wore round your wrist or ankle. On returning to the changing area rather earlier than his companions, having left his glasses and hearing aid safe in the locker, he was unable to read the number imprinted on his rubber band, and when he asked passing bathers to read it for him he was unable to hear their replies, so eventually he handed his key to a small child who led him like a helpless imbecile to his locker and opened it for him.”

**D**ESMOND’S academic specialization is something called Discourse Analysis. “Every utterance or written sentence,” as he tells his first-year students, “*always* has a context, is always in some sense referring to something already said and inviting a response, is always designed to *do* something to somebody, a reader or a listener.” The curse of deafness is its removing that context. Desmond’s mangled cocktail chatter and absurd mishearings at the movies continually amuse us (his misinterpretation of *Brokeback Mountain* is hilarious), but the overall tale describes a state of near tragic isolation. Perhaps the reason Desmond quotes Beethoven’s so-called Heiligenstadt Testament on the subject is so that he, ironic and self-deprecating in the style of his breed, does not have to say these things himself. The composer wrote to his two brothers, “forgive me when you see me draw back when I would gladly have mingled with you. My misfortune is doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow-men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas, I must live alone like someone who has been banished.”

Inscribed, then, within this novel is the darker story of an existential struggle. Desmond clearly feels he can no longer take for granted his easy relationship with his second wife, Fred (short for Winifred). There are too many misunderstandings, and the once reliable healing power of sex is getting harder and harder to pull off. In addition there is Desmond’s ancient father, a formerly capable man whose decline has made him a constant source of worry and guilt to his son, who must make frequent trips to far-off London to visit him in the foul, crumbling house he refuses to leave. The conversations between Desmond and his father, who is also deaf, are excruciatingly funny in terms of discourse analysis but will induce pit-of-the-stomach anxiety in anyone who has had to deal with failing parents.

Desmond’s thoughts are frequently saddened, too, by memories of his first wife Maisie, killed by a drawn-out form of cancer while still a young woman. “I think one of the reasons I’m

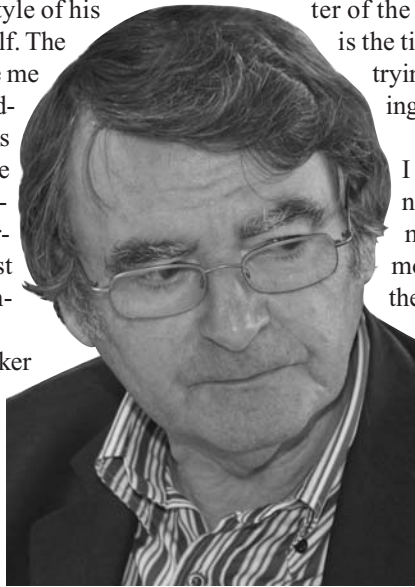
so bitter about my deafness,” Desmond reflects, “is that having got through all that, survived that, and then found new happiness with Fred, I somehow thought I had suffered my fair share of misfortune, paid my dues as the Americans say, and that life would be plain sailing from then on. But of course, that isn’t how it works, not at all.”

To age is to watch one’s world be stripped away bit by bit, and one either comes to terms with that process or is sunk forever. As in the medieval morality play *Everyman*, by the time Everyman meets Death he has been forsaken by nearly everyone and everything he had counted on all his life: Fellowship, Kindred, Goods, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, the Five Wits—even Knowledge. Only Good Works remains to accompany him to his celestial reckoning. We are all haunted by what Desmond qualifies as “the fragility of our grip on life, the ease with which the marks we leave on the surface of the earth are erased.”

An agnostic, Desmond cannot achieve the necessary sense of transcendence through religion, as Fred does in the Catholic Church to which she has recently returned: “She sits and stands and kneels and sings the hymns and murmurs the responses in a kind of trance, happy to be connected to a general ambience of transcendental faith and hope without needing to enquire closely into the rational basis of it all. And who am I to say she is deluding herself, left alone in the house with my doubts and my deafness and the shallow excitable chatter of the Sunday newspapers?” His answer, finally, is the timeless one—so hard to achieve—of simply trying to dwell on life and properly value the passing time.

For some reason, throughout *Deaf Sentence* I kept being reminded of Ian McEwan’s recent novel *Saturday*—a book that dealt with vastly more sensational subject matter and took itself more seriously than Lodge’s, but grappled with the same theme of facing age and mutability. In spite of the general critical enthusiasm for *Saturday*, it seems to me that *Deaf Sentence* gets its message across with much more truth. McEwan’s book, like Lodge’s, had obvious autobiographical elements yet seemed unbecomingly triumphalist, what with the hero’s glamorous job, sporting and sexual prowess, brilliant children, happy household, and adorable wife. Such a scenario may apply to a very few very lucky

mortals, but certainly not to Everyman. Everyman in his 60s is more likely—like Desmond—to be a figure of fun to his children and sometimes to his wife (the infrequent and bumbling sexual encounters between Desmond and Fred are simultaneously comic and moving) and to be confronted every day with humiliating evidence of his diminishing powers: Beauty and Strength have long since deserted him; Discretion and the Five Wits are on their way out the door. It is a mistake to prize our success and our dignity too highly in our remaining time on what Desmond calls Deaf Row.



DAVID LODGE

# The Austerity Artist

## To Siberia

By Per Petterson

Translated by Anne Born  
Graywolf.

245 pp. \$22.00.

Reviewed by  
**Christian Lorentzen**

Senior editor, "Harper's"

**A** FORMER librarian, printer and bookseller born in 1952, Per Petterson has authored seven novels and a collection of stories. Originally published in 1996, *To Siberia*, his third novel, is the latest of his works to appear in this country. (His fourth, *In the Wake*, marked his debut here in 2003.) Last year he won the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award as well as international critical acclaim for his fifth novel, *Out Stealing Horses*. A reader coming to the Norwegian's work for the first time would do well to keep in mind an offhand remark by that book's narrator: "You can learn a lot from films if you have a good memory, watch how people do things and have done them always, but there is not much real work in modern films, there are only ideas. Thin ideas and something they call humor, everything has to be a laugh now. But I hate being entertained, I don't have any time for it."

Set in austere Nordic landscapes and narrated by melancholy loners, Petterson's fiction conforms to those sentiments. He is no mere entertainer; he seeks instead to disquiet the reader and to conjure a sense of reverence—for the natural world and for the receding past. Memory propels his narratives. Modernity, technology and "ideas" are regarded with suspicion and identified with superficiality. Tradition—"how people do things and have done them always"—is observed in minute detail. Petterson's books are bleak and fatalistic, yet they do afford certain pleasures. Laughter is not among them. But then, who ever looked to Scandinavia for comedy?

*To Siberia* is a plotless series of fragmentary remembrances that convey the

story of a dissolving family. Its narrator is an unnamed 60-year-old Danish woman, and its three parts relate episodes in her adolescence before, during, and just after the Nazi occupation of Denmark. (Petterson has said her background is loosely based on that of his late mother.) Imaginative, whimsical and acutely sensitive, she speaks with an appealing humility:

"The town we lived in was a provincial one at that time, in the far north of the country, almost as far as it was possible to travel from Copenhagen and still have streets to walk along. But we had earthworks going back 200 years and a shipyard with more than a hundred workers and a lunchbreak siren that could be heard all over the town at noon. We had a harbor for fishing boats where the throbbing of the trawlers' motors never stopped."

To an American ear, Petterson's cadences immediately sound Hemingwayesque—an influence the author has acknowledged to interviewers. He signals it when the narrator checks *For Whom the Bell Tolls* out of the library.

Near the beginning of *To Siberia* the narrator's paternal grandfather, a farmer who rides around the village on a black horse called Lucifer, hangs himself in his cowshed. His no-nonsense suicide note reads, "I cannot go on any longer." Though "a man full of wrath" given to monthly drinking binges that sometimes leave him lying in a ditch covered in his own vomit, he and his horse commanded the awe of his granddaughter and her older brother, Jesper. After the suicide, Jesper emerges as the most dynamic presence in his sister's life.

Jesper dreams of being a smuggler and a Communist revolutionary. He tells his sister of his plan to live eventually in Morocco, and she, inspired by a picture book, harbors a parallel fantasy of moving to Siberia: "One day I would travel from Moscow to Vladivostok on that train. . . . I wanted open skies that were cold and clear, where it was easy to breathe

and easy to see for long distances." She clings to this vision through the War, into her early 20s. One of the novel's weaknesses is Petterson's failure to develop her character. The grown woman taking lovers after the War seems not much different than the nine-year-old chasing carriages around the dreary village with her older brother.

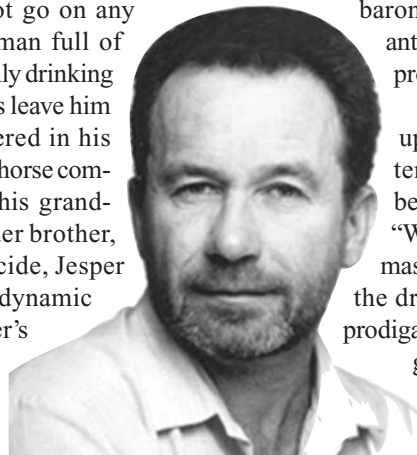
**M**ORE DISMAL than the landscape itself are the lives of the children's parents. Marie, their mother, is a grimly devout Christian with "one foot on earth and one in heaven"; she is mostly glimpsed playing hymns on the family's movie-house piano. Magnus, their father, though possessed of powerful arms and a muted affection for his children, has been rendered a hunchback by his work as a carpenter. He has also fallen into debt and is essentially disinherited after his father's suicide.

In the novel's most stunning scene, the narrator recalls the night she and her brother secretly followed their grandfather to an inn nearby. They peek into the bar, where they see him exchanging taunts with Baron Biegler, a feudal squire from the island of Bangsbo who calls the old man a "peasant farmer." "I don't drink with any toy baron," the grandfather replies. The two come to drunken blows, and

Jesper rushes in and climbs on the baron's back. "I'm no peasant," the boy jeers, "I am a proletarian!"

The *mélée* is broken up by Magnus, who enters by surprise only to be mocked by his father: "Well, if it isn't our joiner-master master-joiner," says the drunken old man. "The prodigal son of agriculture, the good shepherd of sawdust. What's he doing out so late with practically the whole of his family? Isn't it

warm enough at home?" He then knocks the baron to the ground and continues to berate his son, but Magnus pulls Jesper out of the bar. The boy takes one last shot at the baron, yelling, "You're doomed." As they leave the scene, the narrator turns to look at her grandfather "standing alone



**PER PETTERSON**

with the baron's empty glass in his hand, and for a moment it occurred to me that he thought Jesper had meant *him*." By the novel's end, each of the three men she cares for—grandfather, Magnus, and Jesper—will have met his own doom.

Petterson's great talent, amply displayed in *Out Stealing Horses*, is crafting set pieces. Sadly, no other scene in *To Siberia* achieves the power of the bar fight. The narrator saves her brother from drowning. She makes a friend at school who dies mysteriously. She feels the first flashes of puberty. She sneaks into a bar with Jesper where a girlfriend of his shows her how to wear lipstick. She kisses Ruben, the most handsome boy at her school, who happens to be a Jew. Throughout the novel she retains a sympathetic persona, but the way the author pushes her up each step of the coming-of-age ladder feels rote.

**E**NTER THE NAZIS. Their occupation of Denmark did not result in the carnage they delivered elsewhere in Europe. The Danes for the most part maintained their own institutions, and 99 per cent of Denmark's Jews are believed to have escaped the Holocaust. The narrator regards the German invaders with a mixture of fascination and horror—primarily the latter. Jesper, by now working as a printer, joins the resistance. Riots and sabotage finally erupt on August 29, 1943. The narrator is manhandled by a German officer searching for her brother, who is hiding in a shack he built as a boy on the outskirts of the village. She steals away to deliver Jesper food and accompanies him to a rendezvous with the boat that will carry him and Ruben to the safety of Sweden.

This portion of the novel takes on the creaky aspects of historical fiction as Petterson stretches his narrative to fit the time line of the War. Even the loss of the narrator's virginity is coordinated with Jesper's departure. After a fisherman takes her back from the rendezvous point under the cover of night, she confesses: "I still don't know the fisherman's name, or if he's still alive, but I let him use my body that night in his boat. It gave me no pleasure, but he didn't say 'No thanks,' and then *that* was done with." The incident is at once dour and trite.

That tonal dissonance lingers during the novel's final section, which details her time in Copenhagen and Sweden following the War, working as a telephone operator and a waitress and engaging in casual affairs. In the end, she returns home to be greeted by news of her brother's death in Tangiers. On discovering that she is pregnant, her parents disown her.

*To Siberia* is an uneven work, but in the light of the far superior *Out Stealing Horses* it represents what seems a necessary stage in its author's development. Like this novel, *Out Stealing Horses* is narrated by an elderly Scandinavian fixated on the events of the 1940s. The latter novel's 67-year-old protagonist, however, also relates the details of his life in 1999 and fills in some of the five-decade gap between his memories and the present day. The narrator of *To Siberia* reveals nothing about her life beyond 1948, except that, unlike her brother, she survived. Turning a second time to material that obviously compels him, Petterson hit upon a richer formula. He has published two novels in Norway since *Out Stealing Horses*, the latest tantalizingly titled *I Curse the River of Time*. I hope to see him outstrip himself again.

## A Time of Magic

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### Ms. Hempel Chronicles

By Sarah Shun-lien Bynum  
Harcourt.

193 pp. \$23.00.

Reviewed by

### Sarah Harrison Smith

Managing editor, New York  
"Times Magazine"; author,  
"The Fact Checker's Bible"

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**T**HIS BOOK'S eight funny, astute, beautifully written stories form a Bildungsroman of sorts. Sarah Shun-lien Bynum's title character, Beatrice Hempel, is a young teacher at a private school in an unnamed city. After revealing her strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, Bynum ultimately sees her on the way to a new life.

Though engaged to be married and living with her boyfriend, Ms. Hempel is not quite grown up; her success as a teacher is in part due to her complicity with her students: "She had chosen teaching because it seemed to offer both tremendous opportunities for leisure and the satisfaction of doing something generous and worthwhile. Too late she realized her mistake; teaching had invaded her like a mild but inexorable infection; her students now inhabited her dreams, her privacy, her language."

Listening to a pop song students had chosen to accompany a dance routine in assembly, Ms. Hempel recognizes its explicit meaning, but the performers' parents do not. "She was caught, again," she reflects, "in an awkward position: still young enough to decipher the lyrics, yet old enough to feel that a certain degree of outrage was required of her. If only she were truly adult, so that the words were unintelligible, the volume unbearable. Then she couldn't be held responsible." Other events—the death of her father, an unexpected kiss, her mother's decision to turn her childhood home in to a bed-and-breakfast—make it increasingly obvious that Ms. Hempel is being forced into a more mature and active state. Her nostalgia and sympathy, however, are for her lost youth.

Bynum's previously published novel, *Madeleine Is Sleeping*, also was made up of short chapters, some only a few sentences long. It recounts a fairy tale-like dream-within-a-dream. A maiden, possibly recovering from a cruel punishment for a sexual transgression, sleeps interminably, and in her sleep imagines traveling with a troupe of misfits, each compelled by intense, unusual desires. In its allegory, poetic language and imagery, *Madeleine Is Sleeping* is a highly unusual, almost foreign work that reads as if it was very carefully translated from the French or maybe the Czech. It is highly allusive, referring not only to Ludwig Bemelmans' *Madeleine and the Gypsies*, beloved by so many Americans, but to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Sir Sacheverell Sitwell's *Baroque and Rococo*. Although I can't say those references were old hat to me, I recognized the sophisticated scent of distinctly Euro-

pean critical thought. I half expected to find a blurb from Julia Kristeva on the back cover.

Not so with *Ms. Hempel Chronicles*, though one could trace strands of a common sensibility from the first book to the second—if the order of their publication is the order in which they were written. The Ms. Hempel stories appeared separately in journals and collections from 2004 to 2008, while *Madeleine Is Sleeping* appeared as a book in 2004; presumably the author was working on the two projects concurrently for several years. (Publishing your first novel second may be a trend. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, for example, came out before *The Autograph Man*, her second and less accomplished novel, probably because it was in fact written earlier.) Where Bynum's *Madeleine* has a premodern European quality, *Ms. Hempel Chronicles* is distinctly a product of a more familiar time and place. The mixed Chinese and American marriage of Beatrice's parents falls apart in a place that seems a lot like 1980s California.

**B**YNUM'S approach in the two books is very different as well. Her sympathy for the entranced, self-absorbed, uncommunicative state of adolescence is apparent again in *Ms. Hempel Chronicles*, but is rooted more firmly in a recognizable world. Ms. Hempel loves her students. She is interested in and tolerates their oddness as they disappear into the chrysalis of their teenage years and then re-emerge. One such student, described with humor and affection, is Edward Ashe, a former piano prodigy who had composed his own ragtime waltzes, but sat virtually catatonic in class. He moved "with a languor that sometimes slowed into complete suspension." A few years later, as a 10th grader, he has revived, playing the didgeridoo to ecstatic applause at a school talent show.

Bynum portrays adolescence as a time of magic, when children are not subject to ordinary laws of nature. "Just imagine!" one of them exclaims at the thought of life's possibilities, clapping "her hands rapturously against her thighs, as though her shorts had caught fire. The bodies of Ms. Hempel's students often did that: fly off in strange directions, seemingly of their own accord."

Ms. Hempel is witness to the magical transformations of adolescence, but is somehow set apart from it. Teaching, Bynum suggests, is a cocoon of the wrong sort for her, a delightful trap from which it is difficult to emerge. In a story entitled "Yurt," published originally in the *New Yorker*, Ms. Hempel's engagement has been broken, for reasons both vague and specific, and a former teacher who is pregnant returns to visit the school before leaving the city to make her home in a yurt (a Mongolian-type structure) upstate. Ms. Hempel is envious that her former colleague has found a route out of teaching; she herself had fantasized about having a debilitating accident in order to escape.

"You're brilliant," she tells Ms. Duffy. "You are. Because we can't leave to make more money; that's despicable. And we can't leave to do something easier, some nice quiet job in an office; that would be so embarrassing! Am I supposed to tell my kids, 'Okay, I'm off to answer phones at an insurance company'? It's impossible. So what can we do? We can always . . ." Ms. Hempel gestured helplessly at Ms. Duffy's belly. "Why didn't I think of that?" She had imagined a body cast instead."

Yet Ms. Duffy cannot quite let go either. She visits the classroom where she used to reign and starts to correct the new teacher's spelling and punctuation. In this and other scenes, Bynum perceptively caricatures the control obsession of career instructors while sympathizing with their horror at misplaced apostrophes.

**D**ESPITE the obvious similarities between *Madeleine Is Sleeping* and *Ms. Hempel Chronicles*—poetic language, concern with the imagination, emergent sexual drives both innocent and more perverse—the new work has a trickier stunt to pull off in blending fantasy with modernity. *Madeleine* was foreign in place and time, which made it more possible to accept the challenges it posed to linear narrative structure and

reason. In *Ms. Hempel* Bynum occasionally seems to get the tone wrong, notably when her realism seems too dominated by the imagination or when the realism veers too far toward the literal.

The latter is especially jarring where the subject is sex. Bynum is wonderful describing the sensual and the erotic, but

the language of her more graphic sexual references seems to be spoken from another sensibility. Perhaps its jarring effect is intended to underscore her heroine's predicament. Ms. Hempel is at odds with her fiancé in bed: She aspires to "warm bodies in the dark, sighing and rustling, then arcing up in perfect tandem,

like synchronized swimmers," while his ideal "involved something much more strenuous and well lit and out of the ordinary." Ms. Hempel wishes she could have rescued him in adolescence and taught him the delights of the simpler range of pleasures she is fluent in.

Bynum wisely leaves unstressed the echo of this imagined rescue in Ms. Hempel's nurturing of a teenage student, to whom she offers unconventionally expressed warmth and appreciation of his "wildness and beauty and torment." In the book's final story, "Bump," when Ms. Hempel and her student have both graduated to new lives, she learns of her impact on him and it is clear that she succeeded in rescuing him. Her satisfaction is the most profoundly realized aspect of the book: "A slow warmth suffused Beatrice's face, her body—she felt as if she'd been set alight."

Thus is Ms. Hempel released to her new life, and a new cocooning, albeit not that of adolescence: "She'd wake up late in the morning, throbbing with surprise and pleasure, aghast at what her subconscious was capable of." It is easy to assume that *Ms. Hempel Chronicles* contains autobiographical elements, but perhaps nowhere more than in this admission of the richness and peculiarity of her dreams, which have yielded quite different yet equally successful and resonant books.



SARAH SHUN-LIEN BYNUM

# On Poetry

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## How Verse Influences Verse

By Phoebe Pettingell

**F**RIENDSHIPS AMONG POETS can ignite sparks that flame into innovation. Consider those evenings at London's Mermaid Tavern with William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe, sitting over their drinks, reinventing English verse; or William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge discussing politics and the sublime while strolling through the Grasmere Lake District; or Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot shoring up fragments of cultural ruins in the wake of World War I. Now *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 928 pp., \$45.00), edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton, details the fruitful relationship of two of the late 20th century's most influential American poets.

Many of these letters have been published individually in other collections. By including both sides of the conversation, *Words in Air* allows us to listen in on an intimate dialogue between two people who were arguably closer to each other than to any spouse or lover. This would be fascinating merely for the gossip—both were witty observers of the major literary and political figures who crossed their paths. More significantly, the correspondence clarifies their profound influence on each other's writing. As an added treat, their exchanges read like a gripping epistolary novel, dramatizing the trajectories of their troubled lives and brilliant careers against the backdrop of revolution in Brazil, John F. Kennedy's assassination, and the United States' involvement in Vietnam.

During his lifetime (1917-1977), Lowell gained greater renown; until shortly before her death, Bishop (1911-1979) remained something of a poet's poet. Lowell's frequent re-creation of his style and rhetoric captured wide attention. The

scion of a venerable New England family, naturally gregarious, he thrived in the literary culture of the time and briefly basked in the political glamour of the Kennedys' "Camelot" court. By contrast, Bishop composed slowly—sometimes letting ideas mature for decades. She was a deeply private person who spent 16 years of her life in Brazil, outside the American mainstream.

Despite many fallow periods and frequent bipolar breakdowns that his second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, compared to living through a Dostoyevsky novel, "only much more painful," Lowell published 18 books of verse, translations and plays, to Bishop's four slim verse collections, several prose collections, and some English renderings of Brazilian writing. She envied his prolific output and tried not to be "jealous" of his candor about his own experiences (including three marriages to writers, madness, and the burden of following his famous ancestors). Lowell's parents "drowned" their only son in their own dysfunctions, leaving him torn between "the Puritanical iron hand of constraint and . . . gushes of pure wildness."

Bishop was an orphan. Her father died a few months after her birth; when she was four, her mother was permanently institutionalized. Elizabeth, who never saw her again, was passed around among relatives. Although sickly, she was a good student and graduated from Vassar, where Mary McCarthy was a classmate. As a young woman Bishop was close to Marianne Moore, the Great Lady of Modernism, but never became a disciple. Shortly after meeting Lowell, she described herself as "the loneliest person who ever lived." More than a little in love with her, he coveted her self-containment and sharp eye for detail, not to mention her unerring ear for false notes. About one of Lowell's protégés she observed waspishly: "That Anne Sexton I think still has a bit too much romanticism and what I think of as the 'our

beautiful old silver' school of female writing which is really boasting about how 'nice' we were. V. Woolf, K.A. Porter, E. Bowen, R. West, etc.—they are all full of it.” In Bishop’s poems profound psychological perceptions combine with reticence and understatement to convey more than the most fervid rhetorical descriptions. Like George Herbert, she can talk about unhappiness with a rueful acceptance and serenity, illuminating the texture of existence in all its particularity—“awful but cheerful,” as she puts it in “The Bight,” one of her most powerful poems.

Bishop’s life, though, was no less troubled than Lowell’s. Chronic ill health and periodic bouts of alcoholism often disabled her. Unlike Lowell, she kept these private, as she did her homosexuality. At 40, she moved to Brazil. But the idyllic life she and the Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares made for themselves began to fall apart as the country destabilized. For a while, Lota worked closely with Governor Carlos Lacerda in redesigning Rio de Janeiro. Bishop’s lengthy letters describing daily existence in the Brazilian countryside and the intricacies, corruption and violent upheavals of the country’s politics are enthralling documents. They prompted Lowell to write, in 1965, with a tragic lack of foresight: “How wonderful you are Dear, and how wonderful that you write me letters. . . . In this midsummer moment I feel at peace, and that we both have more or less lived up to our so different natures and destinies.”

Sadly, the most tragic phases of their lives were still to come. As Brazil’s political situation disintegrated, Lota descended into depression and Bishop began to look elsewhere for emotional support. Lota committed suicide in Bishop’s New York apartment in 1969. Remorse over this loss engendered some of Bishop’s most moving writing. She had returned to the States just at the moment Lowell precipitously left the long-suffering Hardwick and their young daughter for the volatile Lady Caroline Blackwood. He moved to England with her, where they had a child while waiting for his divorce from Hardwick. *The Dolphin* (1973), his account in verse of this transition, caused his sharpest disagreement with Bishop, who was horrified by his liberal borrowings from Hardwick’s distraught letters. Bishop pleaded, “I love you so much I can’t bear to have you publish something that I regret and that you might live to regret, too.” Lowell was then too manic to understand what she meant. Only after the predictable firestorm from the press and furious demands from a wounded Hardwick in their divorce proceedings did he concede, “My sin (mistake?) was publishing. I couldn’t bear to have my book (my life) wait inside me like a dead child.” Bishop resignedly comforted him: “We all have irreparable and awful actions on our consciences.”

Early in their friendship, Lowell wrote in praise of Bishop’s poem about a fish, “I’m a fisherman myself, but all my fish be-

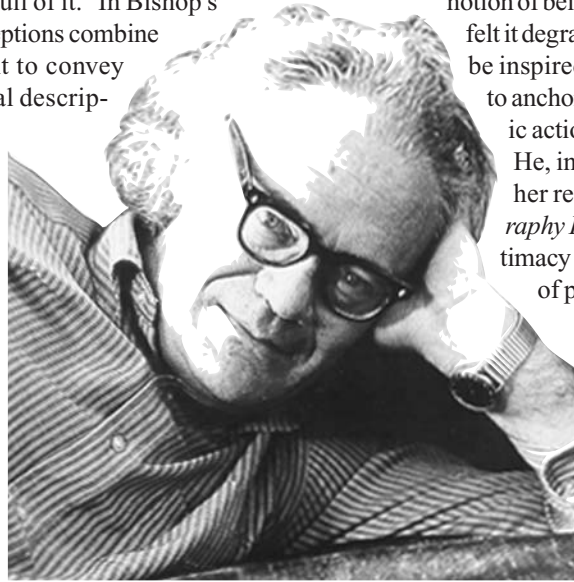
came symbols, alas!” In a late sonnet, he called her an “unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect.” Bishop resented the notion of being anyone’s muse—even Lowell’s. She felt it degrading that she should inspire rather than be inspired. Nevertheless, she did teach Lowell to anchor his ideas in life rather than in symbolic action, and he became a better writer for it. He, in turn, helped her to overcome some of her reticence. The stunning lyrics of *Geography III* (1976) represented a new kind of intimacy for Bishop, free of her earlier evasions of personal material.

In recent years, Bishop’s reputation has eclipsed Lowell’s. But *Words in Air* confirms my conviction that the current judgment is unfair. Lowell’s work possesses the breadth and fearlessness that are the marks of our greatest poets. His powerful rhetoric, however, tended to cramp his would-be disciples, who risked swamping their puny voices in his

sonorities. Bishop, by contrast, taught her admirers that verse need not shout and that capturing the texture of a landscape can be more revealing than gothic psychodrama. Her method has limitations, a by-product of her perfectionism. Yet her work, too, will endure for its distinctive clarity and wisdom. I predict that when the dust settles, and Bishop and Lowell seem as distant in time from us as Emily Dickinson or Robert Browning, they will be read side by side, continuing the dialogue they pursued throughout their lives.

**P**OETS PERIODICALLY refresh tired conventions by studying the art of another culture, then absorbing it into their own. Elizabethan lyricists borrowed French devices, as did some of the early Modernists, and later John Ashbery. Exposure to East European and South American poetry helped English and U.S. poets of the mid-20th century reinvent themselves. When the Sinologist Arthur Waley began publishing translations of Chinese verse in the 1920s, the short-lived Anglo-American “Imagist” movement seized on its concentrated images. In almost every subsequent generation, various schools of Western poets have latched on to Li Po, composing sparse lines evoking wet leaves, chirping crickets and distant mountains. David Hinton’s *Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 512 pp., \$45.00) now provides a reintroduction to this often borrowed tradition.

China has prized verse from the 15th century B.C.E. to the present, though Hinton’s volume only takes us through the 12th century of the Common Era. One intriguing feature of the culture is that written Chinese has differed so markedly from the spoken vernacular that “classical Chinese was a literary language alive primarily in a body of literary texts, which means



**ROBERT LOWELL**

that it remained relatively unchanged across millennia.” Some of its characters retain elements of the original pictographs—so that the words for “stairs” or “grass” visually suggest ladders and stalks. Grammar is ambiguous: “Prepositions and conjunctions are rarely used, leaving relationships between lines, phrases, ideas, and images unclear; the distinction between singular and plural is only rarely and indirectly made; there are no verb tenses, so temporal location and sequence are vague; very often the subjects, verbs and objects of verbal action are absent.” Hinton argues that this reflects *wu*, the Taoist concept of “the emptiness that precedes and follows existence.”

Ancient Middle Eastern and European poets wrote epics about battles, their Chinese counterparts—even as they witnessed war—tended to dwell on landscapes and people. The tradition lacks works with the panoramic sweep of “Gilgamesh,” “The Iliad,” “The Aeneid,” the Eddas, or “La Chanson de Roland.” Nonetheless, many ancient Chinese poems contain familiar echoes—largely because they have influenced or been imitated by many modern writers. For instance, these lines of Lao Tzu:

*A Way you can call Way isn't the perennial Way.  
A name you can name isn't the perennial name:  
the named is mother to the ten thousand things,  
but the unnamed is origin to all heaven and earth*

The wise foolishness of the Beats or Robert Bly can be heard here.

A lyric from the first century B.C.E. entitled “Watering Horses at a Spring Beneath the Great Wall” opens with melancholy lines that could easily have been penned by Robert Lowell in the early 1970s, around the time he published *History*:

*Riverside grass so lavish and azure-green,  
those distant roads, I'm longing in gossamer  
skeins unceasing, distant roads I can't bear  
longing, longing.*

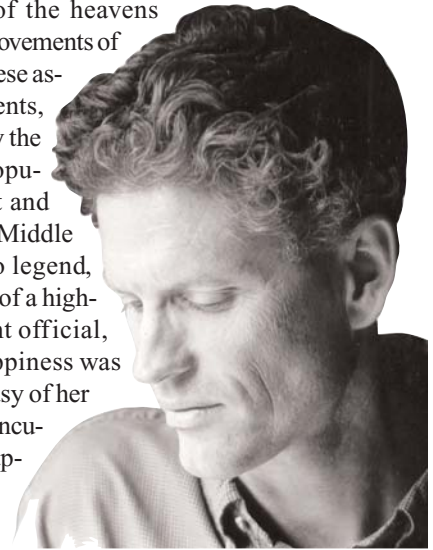
In “Home Again Among Fields and Gardens,” T’ao Ch’ien (356-427 C.E.)—the first Chinese poet to veer away from formal tradition, strive for a natural voice, and incorporate personal experiences—sounds something like Elizabeth Bishop:

*It's true, of course.  
Life's its own mirage of change. And it ends  
returned into all empty absence. What else?*

Some of these resemblances may be unconscious on Hinton’s part, some deliberate. The same may be true of certain prominent American poets. W.S. Merwin has acknowledged his debt to Buddhist poets and published his own translations of them.

**O**CCASIONALLY Chinese poets developed innovative forms untried in the West until quite recently. Su Hui, one of the relatively rare women poets of the tradition, writing in the 4th century C.E., devised a poem Hin-

ton titles “Star Gauge,” based on an armillary sphere: a three-dimensional map of the heavens meant to gauge the movements of stars and planets. These astronomical instruments, probably invented by the Chinese, became popular in the Near East and the West during the Middle Ages. According to legend, Su Hui was the wife of a high-ranking government official, but the couple’s happiness was marred by her jealousy of her husband’s favorite concubine. When he was appointed governor of a distant province, Su Hui refused to accompany him unless the concubine was left behind, and he departed with his mistress. In her loneliness Su Hui composed “Star Gauge,” a grid in numerous colors that can be read in endless ways, generating several thousand possible poems. Thus meaning moves ceaselessly, like the heavens themselves, orbiting around *hsin*—the word for “heart and mind” and also the Pole Star.



**DAVID HINTON**

Although Hinton does not mention it, according to many of the legends Su Hui wove the poem on her loom. The original has only recently been reconstructed, but its story runs throughout Chinese literature. In a happy ending, the poet’s husband was so stirred by his wife’s expression of love and longing that he returned to her. “By placing our inner psychology within the space of the sky,” Hinton observes, “the poem enacts a different account of the human interior. In this account, the human heart-mind is an integral part of the starry universe, its complex and finally unfathomable movements of thought and feeling swirling through the grand movements of the stars.”

The later poets in Hinton’s collection had entered a decadent “silver age” of cynical reflections on human behavior, including rueful musing on drunkenness and womanizing. The last poem in the anthology, by the 12th-century master Yang Wan-Li, is entitled “Don’t Read Books”—a kind of Asian version of Marianne Moore’s famous “Poetry.” Moore’s poem begins, “I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle,” yet she concludes that poetry is essential for its power to create “imaginary gardens with real toads.”

Hinton has performed a dual service. His volume reminds us of much that has entered into our own literary tradition while exposing us to many concepts alien to Western thought. It also emphasizes a universal principle: The greatest influence on verse is other verse. Relationships among poets advance the art, delighting our imaginations even as we gain insight into our own inner landscapes.