The Cresset

A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs
October, 1989
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To mark photography's 150th year, the V.U. Museum of Art is exhibiting this fall, "Nathan Lerner: 50 Years of Photographic Inquiry." Lerner is an internationally recognized, Chicago-based artist/photographer. His images have explored perceptions of outer and inner worlds starting with documents of the Great Depression to light-play studies when he was teaching at the New Bauhaus/Institute of Design in the late 1930s and 40s, to form oriented responses to contemporary Japan. Highlights of his exhibit are presented in this month's Cresset with an essay by an artist/critic who has known Lerner since their Institute of Design days.

Front Cover: Nathan Lerner, Closed Eye, Chicago 1940.
President Bush's address on drugs gives plenty of opportunity for reflection to people who see things in ethical or religious terms. The actions to which those people may be led as a result of their reflections can be expected to be various. Not all will choose to be soldiers in the War Against Drugs.

One surely must ask questions about the enemy we are being asked to fight. No one could deny that as a people we are experiencing a group of symptoms that are profoundly disturbing. We hear and read continually, and certainly President Bush and his drug czar William Bennett have been vocal in this matter, about increased crimes, social disruption, violence, and the like, all carefully labelled "drug-related." There is no doubt that certain areas of the country are experiencing these symptoms at levels that are intolerable, and those who are victimized justifiably cry out for attention and relief. The pain and grief in the voice of a young girl interviewed on a public radio news broadcast on the morning after the President's speech tore at the heart; her mother, her aunts, even her deacon on crack, she herself wanted to die. "But if I do, who will help my little brother and my little sister? Who will help them?" Those of us who are in most senses outside her pain need to find ways of alleviating it, of being her older brothers and sisters.

But, typical of the American penchant for the quick fix, particularly if it sounds tough, aggressive, and, even better, militaristic, we are strapping on our six shooters to go out to war without knowing much about the enemy, and without thinking about the consequences of our precipitate wars. The government, and indeed many citizens, want to swing into action and cut a wide swath through the thickets of our troubles by making lots of new laws, changing the Constitution if necessary, and putting lots more people in jail. It's the Seebees to the rescue on the sands of yet another Iwo Jima.

But surely many of the symptoms of the national distress are illegal already. Murder, robbery, extortion, abuse, threats with menace, harassment—all these, and all the way down the line through vandalism, operating machinery in an unsafe manner, and disturbing the peace, to being a "public nuisance." These actions, all of them considered threats to public well-being, are punishable in law. All these behaviors are subject to various prosecutions and punishments, though admittedly some, like creating a public nuisance, are ambiguous and capable of interpretation. It seems perfectly reasonable to keep on apprehending, prosecuting, and punishing persons who commit those behaviors—for whatever reasons.

What does not seem reasonable is to label as "criminal" behaviors which sometimes lead to the crimes listed above, and sometimes do not. To call people who ingest an illegal substance guilty of breaking the law against such ingestion is reasonable. But to call them guilty of the murders and mayhem committed by others is not reasonable, and it is not likely to result in any positive social gain. We will not achieve general social improvement by attempting to criminalize all behaviors which many of us think can be damaging to the body politic, as well as the body individual. Didn't we learn that in the experience of Prohibition?

Perhaps the most troubling part of all this is the problem we human beings have with pleasure. And in the long history of attempts to understand our desire for pleasure, and to regulate the behaviors based on that desire, churches have had relatively little to say. The general impression seems to be (though this is far from accurate and far from subtle) that Christianity's response to the problem of pleasure is "Don't." There are Biblical verses, often part of Christianity's gnostic baggage, that can be read that way. But there is not much explicit "theology of pleasure" in what we Christians confess. We don't know where, in our systems of values, to put it, especially pleasure experienced in the body. In hymns and liturgy we usually sing about preferring God to this world's vain pleasures, or about the pleasure of serving God or being in God's house, but that tends to sum it up.

And what about "drug-induced pleasure"? Is wine wrong, or coffee, or cigarettes, or chocolate? Do churches have something sensible and helpful to say here? If these substances are wrong only to the extent that they may cause (tricky assumption) some illegal behavior, then isn't it a logical fault to say that using them ought to be illegal? Further, if we begin simply labelling things illegal because we don't like them, and we don't think they are good for people, all kinds of
pleasures may be in trouble, viz. the Mikado's little list. We might suggest starting with romance novels and Italian tenors, though doubtless some would be demur.

The Victorians, in all their admirable zeal for helping people to be good, got themselves caught in some situations that ought to look familiar. Those who have choices among pleasures and who discriminate among them believe--may even know--that some pleasures are bad. That some goods ought to be encouraged and others discouraged. Thus, because it is good for people to keep a Sabbath in rest and quietness, they made laws against games, amusements, entertainments, outdoor eating and drinking, and all selling of any of these on Sunday. It happened of course that because of the sixty hour work week, the poor could only enjoy games and amusements on Sunday, the day they were forbidden to indulge in them. The Victorians had to learn that prohibiting pleasures can be done only with great care, at least in societies that attempt to regulate civic life with reasonableness and equity.

Tremendous needs drive the drug business, legal and illegal. Until we have better things to say about those needs than "don't have them," we ought perhaps to cool our hot pursuit of the prosecution of pleasure.

About This Issue

Generally The Cresset contains a lot of words. This issue, in contrast, has a lot of pictures. In a year when photography has everyone's attention, we are pleased to join in with the Valparaiso University Museum of Art's observance of the anniversary. The closed eye on the cover is a provocative image for a journal of opinion, and demands attention in a peculiar way. When we ask "What does it mean?" the picture steadfastly refuses a simple answer. We spend a good deal of time, even those of us in the questioning professions, with our eyes shut. Perhaps pictures, like stories, can help us to see ourselves as we never can without their help. Richard Maxwell provides a witty guide to the Goya exhibition most of us will not see, but nonetheless opens our eyes to the strongly political and social dimensions, not only of the artist, but of the curators and collectors and critics who interpret him for us.

Since our writers often find themselves "far-flung," we've asked them to write home about their travels. Al Trost has obliged with his letter from Ireland. And closer to home, Bruce Berner takes on the flag problem as his first contribution as a writer for "The Nation."

Peace,

GME

Living on Borrowed Time

We begged for summer, each day a record heat to dry imported pinon for the fall. We wanted autumn long and cold, frost every dawn and dark clouds promising good snow.

Let pears be green and hard, we'd bake them, let tight-skinned grapes be tart, the better for new wine. As clocks turned into dusk, we raked gold leaves and hired a chimney sweep, laid in a stack of logs and waited for the snow.

Walter McDonald
The exhibition "Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment," which has been on an extended tour this year (Boston, New York, Madrid), includes many of the painter's most bizarre productions: there are gory fantasies of witchcraft, allegorical tableaux so grotesque as to spook the most settled onlooker, depictions of the disgusting or laughable people who (to a considerable extent) dominated successive generations of the Spanish monarchy. This is the Goya whom the modern world expects, perhaps, too readily; to quote the title of the artist's most famous etching, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters. In other words, human critical faculties prove helpless against-or even exacerbate—the irresistible nightmares of society and history. We live with evil in a helpless daze.

Everybody knows the morbid Goya. His existence has been confirmed again and again by a succession of brilliant commentaries over the last two centuries. The present exhibit goes against received opinion by presenting the anticipated Goyesque nightmares within a framework of reason, illumination, and enlightenment. Scholarly articles have long established Goya's connection with certain Enlightenment figures and ideas. The curators of this show, Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Eleanor A. Sayre, go a big step further; they want to demonstrate that Goya is a full-fledged liberal, committed to those (largely) French ideas which were, in his time, turning the world upside-down.

I saw "Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment" at the Metropolitan Museum, where it was hung in a series of spacious, uncluttered rooms to suggest the history of Spain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The country had a rough time in these years. Carlos III was progressive and competent; his successor, Carlos IV, gave over governance to unscrupulous advisors; claiming power after several years in exile (during which Napoleonic puppets dominated the country), Ferdinand VII proved a tyrant and a booby. This sequence suggests bad luck in kings; it also suggests a problem which often comes up when elites try to reform backward countries. Every step towards modern civil procedures creates a reactionary backlash. Rulers not only shape but are also shaped by this tendency.

One highlight of the exhibition was a group of portraits featuring some leading figures in the Spanish Enlightenment. Most students of this period are familiar with Goya's likenesses of idiotic or mean figures at the court, and those have their place here: there are two ghastly Ferdinand VIIIs, an overfed Manuel Godoy (the so-called "Prince of Peace," lover of Carlos IV's queen and a major power at court), as well as a few other items in the same spirit. But the spotlight is on some less often-seen images, from locations like Parma, the Bank of Spain or (most tantalizingly) "private collection." For instance, the show begins with Mengs's portrait (1761) of a beaming Carlos III; then, a few yards away, the viewer can turn to Goya's 1785 portrait of the Conde de Floridablanca, Carlos's prime minister. This was one of the artist's first commissions, a crucial work in his career.

Goya depicts Floridablanca as the very model of a modern major bureaucrat. He stands, stage center, in a draped, rather dark state apartment, looking well-dressed at the viewer. He is dressed in a wonderful outfit, red jacket and breeches, white and gold waistcoat, blue sash, with a simply-dressed wig. (So: a touch of splendor, moderated by austerity.) To his left is the young Goya, exhibiting a canvas--perhaps a preliminary sketch of the picture we are looking at; at his right is a splendid clock, suggesting authority and efficiency both, and below it papers mapping one of Floridablanca's most important public works, the Aragonese Canal. In the upper right corner hangs an oval portrait of Carlos, repeating the image familiar from Mengs. Is that a watch Floridablanca holds, or a pair of spectacles? In either case, the gesture encapsulates a kind of administrative heroism. This man projects enormous energy and confidence; he depends on a shaky system of court favoritism, within which he exercises power. The role of bureaucrat is larger here, more admirable and significant, than in the clichéd accounts of most modern literature and art. An historical postscript: Godoy made sure that Floridablanca spent most of his later years in exile. He died shortly after a short return to power, in 1808.

"Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment" features a generous selection of single and group portraits on this level of accomplishment—the family of Infante Don Luis (an outstanding multiple portrait, respecting differences among individuals, from a self-conscious hairdresser to a beaming courtier in a strange bandage-
cap, but organized around a dominant personality: Doña Teresa de Vallabriga), the Condesa-duquesa de Benavente (wearing her extravagant ribboned hat suavely: a woman of the world), the banker Francisco de Cabarrús (proponent of universal education; painted starkly, the single actor in his own uncluttered space). Not least, there are three self-portraits, the first from the artist’s youth, the second from the 1790s (about twenty years later), the third from his old age. It is the latter, normally on display at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, that has drawn the most attention.

While its predecessors present Goya as, respectively, a sensitive novice and a feisty technician, the Minneapolis picture shows a man recently recovered from death. We see head-on, in a foreshortened view whose physical impossibility somehow adds to the composition’s effectiveness, the bed-ridden artist supported from behind by his doctor and friend Arrieta, who offers him a glass of a red-tinted medicine: the red echoes that of the blanket drawn up to the artist’s waist. Goya is ashen-faced, seemingly on the edge of unconsciousness; the doctor is steady, intent on drawing his patient back from his sickness. Behind them is a row of what appear to be classical busts: the one on the far right, just behind Goya’s shoulder, could almost be a skull. These solemn heads loom out of a darkness which makes it impossible to say how they are supported or what their ontological status might be. Equally ambiguous is their relation to the painting’s two chief characters—but (for me) the overall point is unmistakable. The doctor could not more effectively embody the best of those Enlightenment virtues advocated by Floridablanca and others, only now the lesson has been taken to heart: Arrieta’s calm professional sanity is identified with the basis of physical and mental health.

There is much more to say about Goya Attended by Doctor Arrieta—about its combination of religious iconography with a tribute to the everyday practice of science, about its extraordinary color scheme, about its relation to the traditional form of the emblem (Goya writes the plot of the painting beneath it, against a burnished orange band, thus adapting a standard emblematic technique), perhaps most intriguingly about its relation with The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, to which the Arrieta is a kind of delayed counter-blast. (In Sleep, the artist loses control, the owl of Minerva is transformed into a creature of terror; in Arrieta, reason wakes up a protagonist who is about to yield to unconsciousness and its demons.) Through these and other means, Arrieta confirms, while deepening, the thesis advanced by Sayre, Sánchez and their collaborators. Within the context provided by such images, the claim that Goya could resist his own nightmares and the nightmares of his time instead of simply yielding to them gains considerable strength.

It’s not out of line to suppose that the present show might shift the general, educated perception of Goya. On the other hand, the shift will not occur without a struggle—a struggle whose first stage occurred this spring and summer. Two of the most widely circulated essays on the Sánchez/Sayre exhibition were those by Jonathan Brown (The New Republic, 15 May) and Robert Hughes (The New York Review of Books, 29 June). Brown and Hughes present two main claims, each intended to chip away at the plausibility of associating Goya with the Enlightenment, or with the critical exercise of reason. (1) Goya was quite the careerist—a sort of art-historical Sammy Glick—and thus his commitment to such ideas as progress cannot be taken very seriously. (2) No one who understood the evils of the world as well as he
could possibly be called a "liberal" or a "rationalist." From these two arguments follows a decided conclusion. Far from embodying the hopes of the Enlightenment, Goya remains the adherent of romantic nihilism we all know and love. This exhibition has therefore created a painter in its own image, as have, in various other ways, successive generations of interpreters.

The case is argued at great length; it deserves a refutation. I will take up the two main arguments in order. Hughes is especially intent on establishing that Goya would paint anybody, even the despicable Godoy, so long as he could thereby further his career. Furthermore, he goes out of his way to suggest that Goya presents people the way they want to be seen, without any critical stance at all. Even Godoy: 'He may look to us like the prototype of every Latin American dictator that ever diverted foreign aid from Washington to a numbered account in Switzerland, but there is no mistaking Goya's obsequiousness.' Since Goya juxtaposes Godoy with a (literal) horse's ass—not a common gesture in military/heroic portraits—Hughes's question-begging assertion stretches a point somewhat thinly. Similarly, Hughes writes (of a picture not in the show): "it may even be that Charles [IV] and María Luisa were so much uglier in real life that Goya's portraits of them are a positive act of charity." This speculation takes us into never-never land. A look at Goya's portrait of the royal family, to which Hughes is referring, brings us right back: if there was ever a picture which suggested a breakdown in codes of royal authority and relations between patron and artist, this is the one. Hughes has chosen to finesse his way through the question of Goya's sincerity, a troubling matter not to be disposed of with such cavalier ease.

I will return to this problem below, but first I should note that the matter of Goya's pessimism is treated with equal superficiality, especially by Brown. He writes of the year 1812 (after the Napoleonic invasion of Spain), "This was also the period when Goya etched the first section of the Disasters of War, his stirring indictment of the tragic consequences of taking political struggles to the battlefield. The relationship of the Disasters to contemporary events is self-evident."

As Fussell observes, Goya is an exception; indeed he is one of the few eighteenth or nineteenth-century artists to circumvent "popular and genteel" war iconography. Far from a pathological indulgence, the Disasters of War can be understood as a stubborn manifestation of a long tradition, a tradition about to be challenged by the all-enveloping power of public relations and collective mystification.

The Brown and Hughes essays are characterized throughout by argument at once picky and sloppy; each writer goes out of his way to edge around rather than into the difficulties of the case. Since neither critic is usually so obtuse, I seek a reason beyond the local occasion of the Goya exhibit for such patently awkward performances. One prominent stumbling-block is that
now overloaded word, "liberal." No one in this country could fail to remember George Bush's use of "liberal" in the last election or Michael Dukakis's chicken-hearted flight from it. "Liberal" is a term whose modern usage begins in Spain at the time of the Peninsular War; possibly the term has come to the end of its career, except as an insult, but before this perhaps necessary demise it might be just as well to reconsider its history and connotations. To my mind, Brown and Hughes make roughly the same mistake as Dukakis, and less excusably; that is, they accept an implicitly derogatory definition of liberalism, as associated with the Enlightenment and with reason, then do their best to show that they know better as obviously did the painter who is their subject. A liberal, on the definition implied by these critics, is one who functions according to impossibly idealistic expectations, both of himself and of others. Therefore (recurring to topics discussed above), anyone who displays wartime atrocities realistically is not a liberal, nor could any court artist, enmeshed in the rituals of flattery, be so described. Liberals must be pure; they cannot make compromises. Liberals must have their heads in the clouds; Goya moved through a less elevated murk.

Brown and Hughes are not the first to work with the self-cancelling conception of liberalism I have just sketched out. Writing out for his students an Introduction to Romance Languages and Literature, Erich Auerbach noted of Diderot that he was "too easily moved to optimism and enthusiasm to see the real grandeur and misery of our life"—yet it is the same Enlightenment figure who conceived Rameau's Nephew, a dialogue between the optimistic philosophe and a less confident Diderot altogether. (A similar dialogue goes on within Goya: once again, the contrast between Sleep and Arrieta suggests its extent and subtlety.) There's a revealing echo of this approach even in the best extended review of "Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment," Adam Gopnik's. Exploring Goya's place in Western culture, Gopnik writes, "The ideal of reason celebrated in David and in Diderot—clear purpose, expressed in purified form—is far from the tragic ideal of reason that moved Burke and Voltaire." (The New Yorker, June 19. This essay is worth looking up, especially for its comments on the Arrieta picture, on clothes in society portraits, and most generally, on Goya's fascination with surfaces.)

I'm amazed by the need Gopnik feels to sneak Burke in with Voltaire; of all the great eighteenth-century philosophers, the former is probably the furthest from sympathy with the Enlightenment or with the critical exercise of reason. His presence in Gopnik's sentence suggests more a cultural obeisance to the 1980s and its peculiar political confusions than it does an approach to Goya. Realism must be seen as conservative and tragic. Voltaire (or Goya) is along for the ride; he may consider himself lucky.

Finally, a memory and a moral. My first acquaintance with Goya came on the beaches of Malibu, where, one afternoon during the summer of 1959, I watched the image of a gigantic unclothed woman towed across the sky. Above her were written the words The Naked Maja; she was an advertisement for a film and—though I didn't know it—a reproduction of a painting. The reproduction was effective (far more so than the film, I am told); however, it was the whole situation that best caught the spirit of the artist, whose paintings, etchings and drawings include so many depictions of flight reimagined as folly. Retrospectively, I am tempted to inscribe this excellent California beach scene with a little commentary (as though it were one of Goya's satirical-visionary engravings): "Where is this infernal contraption going, filling the air with smoke and the mind of surfers with wonder? The author suspects that to rise is to fall, but he also has another reminder for his readers. He who depicts this airborne monstrosity is not necessarily he who rides it." It is advice along these lines that I would offer to the critics of the Goya show: they have mixed up the painter with some of his less edifying creations; they have skewed—quite unnecessarily—the history of liberal thought and its relation to the history of images in our culture.
Charles Vandersee

DRIFTING TOWARD GREATNESS

Only Manhattan has the great Strand Bookstore, with tables full of current books at half price, things you really want (often untouched review copies). What the town of Dogwood has are bookstores that put out aged remainders. So you drive an hour west, across the Blue Ridge and then north, until you reach Mount Crawford and the Green Valley auction barn.

Four times a year, on two successive weekends, this big barn off a dusty farm road turns into a crowded book fair for readers up and down the Shenandoah Valley. Local people, apparently (I've never inquired), you really want (often untouched review copies). With tables full of current books at half price, things you want (often untouched review copies). What the town of Dogwood has are bookstores that put out aged remainders. So you drive an hour west, across the Blue Ridge and then north, until you reach Mount Crawford and the Green Valley auction barn.

I've found there the stories of Andre Dubus, Anne Tyler's The Accidental Tourist, Shirley Hazzard's The Transit of Venus—fiction I may have noticed in the New York Times Book Review at publication time but instantly forgot. There I also encountered Russell Banks's novel Continental Drift.

The blurbs (by poet Dave Smith and novelists Joyce Carol Oates and John Edgar Wideman) did not so much entice me as did one of the two epigraphs, by Wallace Stevens. For a fiction writer to start out by quoting Stevens, a poet's poet, is irresistibly provocative. Besides which, Stevens is the American poet of the twentieth century whom I most care for. But even thus prompted, I'm not likely to buy a new novel, even at $2, unless there's something enticing about the prose. Continental Drift opens with these remarkable lines:

It's not memory you need for telling this story, the sad story of Robert Raymond Dubois, the story that ends along the back streets and alleys of Miami, Florida, on a February morning in 1981, that begins way to the north in Catacomb, New Hampshire, on a cold, snow-flecked afternoon in December 1979, the story that tells what happened to young Bob Dubois in the months between the wintry afternoon in New Hampshire and the dark, wet morning in Florida and tells what happened to the several people who loved him and to some Haitian people and a Jamaican and to Bob's older brother Eddie Dubois who loved him but thought he did not and to Bob's best friend Avery Boone who did not love him but thought he did and to the women who were loved by Bob Dubois nearly as much and as differently from the way he loved his wife Elaine. It's not memory you need, it's clear-eyed pity and hot, old-time anger and a Northern man's love of the sun, it's a white Christian man's entwined obsession with race and sex and a proper middle-class American's shame for his nation's history. This is an American story of the late twentieth century, and you don't need a muse to tell it, you need something more like a loa, or mouth-man, a voice that makes speech stand in front of you and not behind... Let Legba come forward, then, come forward and bring this middle-aging white mouth-man [Russell Banks] into speech again...

Here was a brash voice, terribly self-assured (even oracular), maybe hysterical—not boding well. But interesting: taking risks, an activity not common these days. The risk of giving away in advance much information about the story; the blatant assertions about big stuff, love and anger and pity and history; the cryptic summoning of an unheard-of kind of inspirer or voice-giver, a loa named Legba.

I bought this book on April 16, 1988; it had been published in 1985 by Harper & Row. Of it, I knew nothing; of the author, nothing until noticing his birth year (1940) with the copyright notice; of his other seven books nothing except their titles listed in the front matter. Within a few months I read this book three times, for three different reasons. What I now wish to do is to make some rather large claims for it. In so doing, also make some comments about why we read novels in the late twentieth century, and perhaps also raise the question of who "we" are.

Claims arise from merit, I will obviously be arguing, but important also is the fact that Russell Banks's newest novel, Affliction, was published last month, September 1989. Reading it in June, for a short notice elsewhere, I judged it to be less ambitious and successful than Continental Drift, a few comments later about this new novel (an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club) may make clearer the accomplishments of the earlier one.

Author Charles Vandersee usually writes a letter from Dogwood. This essay results from the encouragement, perhaps even the persistent demand, of interim editor, Richard Maxwell. The second part of this review will appear in the December Cresset.

October, 1989
II

My first reading of *Continental Drift*, soon after purchase, knowing nothing of Banks or his work, was not an innocent or pure reading. For a "professional reader," innocence is not possible. I teach and have taught novels for many years, especially those that fall into a category: American novels. More precisely, North American novels. Professional readers know something about the behavior of such books; many canonical North American novels are by or about young sensitive white males—Ishmael, Huck Finn, reader, "innocence is not possible. I teach and have purchase, knowing nothing of Banks or his work, was Nick Carraway, Jake Barnes, Martin Arrowsmith, Hold­

cence Caulfield, Augie March (in novels such as *Moby-Dick*, *The American*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Catcher in the Rye*).

In *Continental Drift* appeared Robert Dubois, age 30, a New Hampshire oil burner repairman. Here was a new character in the long and honorable and interesting line of Young Sensitive White Males: men or boys uncomfortable at home, also not equipped to tackle the world, unwilling to be tied down, generally cursed with ideals. In what ways, I asked, might this latest figure capture my attention?

A question apparently "innocent" but not really. In fact, impatience and skepticism. Can this Russell Banks person really meet the YSWM challenge? It was essential, that is, that Banks know the tradition; "we" cannot accept innocence in serious authors, even as we know "we" as readers lack innocence. Banks sounded plenty serious in that opening oration; did he know the hurdles on the track—the tradition—well enough to surmount them gracefully and in good time? I wondered; the need of "shame" for American history sounded shrill and glib, though tradition has licensed the YSWM to be hypercritical, whether as character or author.

Still, you could call my first reading of *Continental Drift* comparatively innocent, a pleasure trip. On the YSWM question he might venture nothing new, but he might still triumph in form, in language, in calm human intelligence, in action and passion, in local color, in rendering of subordinate characters. "We," that is, still read novels to find a thing shaped well, made well, enriched, animated.

The novel turned out to be a tour de force in two notable ways. First, that loa actually worked, solved a major problem in a truly fascinating way. The problem, also tackled by such American experimenters as Henry James and John Dos Passos, has to do with where the narrator places himself in relation to his story: on one end of the spectrum he can be invisible, on the other end, intrusive. Choosing to be invisible, you dramatize, you present—and you tend to sacrifice your own views on the characters and actions. In choosing to be intrusive, you not only risk "preaching" but you divide the reader's attention between yourself and your story, and your story may suffer a loss of power and impact.

Dos Passos' brilliant stroke in the 1930s, in *U.S.A.*, was virtually to reject the spectrum. In a breezy, slangy Middle American voice he put forth his charac­
ters, but then to comment on them and their times he found newspaper headlines, lines from popular songs, and slogans of the day (extraneous material, in short), which he inserted here and there. Banks, with his loa, also rejects the spectrum; as he later explained in an interview, he had once found in a Jamaican village a native chief who had a "mouth-man," "sort of like our presidential press secretary." "I loved the idea. I thought, now that's what I want; I want a mouth-man. I want to be sort of dim and shy in the background and yet have someone out there in the page taking responsibility for the story."

I later found this mouth-man in Banks's 1980 novel, *The Book of Jamaica* (another YSWM story), where Harris, in a remote native tribe, is depicted as the "strange, intense" spokesman for the chief, in the "Obi" section of the book. Meanwhile, as Banks has explained:

With *Continental Drift* I said, OK, I'll invoke a narrator the way you invoke a loa in Haitian Voudon. Which is to say, I'll allow myself, if I can, to be in a sense possessed; I'll let this voice speak through me, and it'll be of a specific character—the loa will be Legba, who has the specific character of protector of children, guardian of the crossroads, figure that sees backward and forward in time ....

So that in a few places in the novel the narra­tor, emboldened by Legba, stands well back from the characters and performs feats that in his own unaided American voice would be—well, a little strange. He ventu­res, that is, some spectacular analogies and hypothe­ses:

It's as if the creatures residing on this planet in these years, the human creatures, millions of them traveling singly and in families, in clans and in tribes, traveling sometimes as entire nations, were a subsystem inside the larger sys­tem of currents and tides, of winds and weather, of drifting continents and shifting, uplifting, grinding, cracking land.
masses. It's as if the poor forked creatures who walk, sail and ride on donkeys and camels, in trucks, buses and trains from one spot on the earth to another were all responding to unseen, natural forces. . . .

That is part of a section which will introduce certain individual Haitian refugees—seen, as it were, first from the vantage point of the cosmos and only then the vantage point of a human observer, compelled to depict (in detail) the squalor and subservience of their existence. You can call this cosmic vision a sort of jejune indulgence, an over-reaching that twentieth-century narrators are not supposed to attempt. But by ascribing it to Legba's inspiration you may feel its power to extend the imagination beyond American limits. There is a vast region of uncertainty as to what analogies between physical forces and human behavior are sound ones; my suggestion is that the imagination feels itself stretching when entertaining such analogies, regardless of how "true" they are.

And that such stretching is a good thing. In the proper pace of reading, I argue, we do not stand up and object that Banks has reinvented the megaphone, the omniscient narrator, but instead say (subliminally) to ourselves: "There's that loa explaining things again; yes, we were ready for that commentary; yes, he may well have it right."

III

The second way in which Continental Drift seemed to me a tour de force has to do with knowledge. For long stretches, Banks had chosen to leave the U.S.A., in this "American story," going to Haiti, to North Caicos Island, and then to the Bahamas, to render convincingly the inner and outer experiences of desperate islanders paying huge sums to skippers promising to drop them on a Florida beach. Rendering of a wholly different culture is vastly more ambitious than depicting yet another hermetic American small town or alcoholic suburb. I was impressed. A professional reader, skeptical, impatient, is likely to be impressed by ambition.

In fact, during the second reading, four months later (to confirm in my mind that I wanted to use it for class), something curious happened, making me more aware of Banks's impressive knowledge. Infrequently I pick up the Richmond News-Leader, not for its arrogantly reactionary editorial page but to see what's going on in and around the capital. In early August, what was going on, explained a three-part article, was the Yoruba religion, from Africa. I saw the name of Elegba, deity, who appeared in Continental Drift as "Papa Legba," one of the figures prayed to in Haitian rites, and of course our loa. I read about sacrifices of goats and chickens, and other rituals, all in and around Richmond, Virginia, one of them at midnight in the cemetery of St. Matthew Lutheran Church. These were the same rites the Haitians had brought from Africa and taken to Miami, in Banks's novel. Yoruba was thriving in Richmond and other American places, to my surprise—though in America, when it comes to variegated religion, nothing should surprise.

I was impressed. The newspaper articles seemed to confirm the accuracy of Banks's depiction, the rituals and the officiants. He obviously knew a great deal, more than I had stopped to think about. Accuracy about voodoo in the Caribbean meant that probably he had also troubled himself to find out about Haitian life in the U.S., as he takes us into their forty-block area near the I-95 expressway in northeast Miami. Our new America consists not only of well-reported Cubans and Vietnamese and Puerto Ricans but also Jamaicans and Haitians—and Anglos much interested, commercially, in drugs. The very story of America is always the newest group, ethnic or commercial, and how it changes itself and us. A professional reader encountering calm intelligence and new information is impressed, particularly when the novelist has chosen big and important topics as integral parts of his story.

What unites the Haitians and the Dubois family is the fact that all are headed for a "new life"—the essential American theme—in Florida. Florida in the late twentieth century is what the American West used to be: the place where everything will be better. But if united by desire, the two groups are importantly differentiated when it comes to sustenance. The Haitians have religion and its provision for community, the Dubois family doesn't. Here is part of the "drift" of the title, the novel unobtrusively commenting on the drift away from the hope and the sense of belonging which religion and ethnicity provide—any of the religions and nations that have landed in America with a first generation of boat people.

We will all plug in our historical knowledge at this point—Bay Colony Puritans and their religion, the Boston Irish, the Lower East Side Jews, the Pennsylvania German Lutherans—as we recall the waning of fervor that has often accompanied acculturation in America. You gradually belonged to "America," leaving your shtetl or your chapel, and the increasing size and spread of America left you unsure what ties of suste-
nance and obligation could be acquired in mere (huge) national affiliation.

So that Bob Dubois, French Canadian in ancestry, "goes occasionally to mass with his wife and children and believes in God the way he believes in politicians—he knows He exists but doesn't depend on Him for anything" (the loa conveniently inspiring these summary characterizations). In sharp contrast to Dubois' inert faith is the frenzied ritual experienced by Vanise, the one survivor of the Haitians forced to jump from Bob's boat when intercepted by the Coast Guard. She has to be brought "back to the land of the living," this young woman who has been raped repeatedly since leaving her home island, has lost her child, and has nearly drowned. At the ceremony in an abandoned Miami warehouse the drums beat furiously, the priest "reaches into her mouth and draws out her tongue"; there is chanting, dancing, the bloody execution of a chicken over her bare legs, cooking and singing.

IV

Ambition, then, in gaining knowledge about the new and exotic in America, and its connection with the older America. Ambition in voice and in narrative strategy. Also, alertness to one central—indeed, constituting—theme in America, the ever-changing immigrant patterns. And attention to a basic human question, religion, the possible consequences of its presence or absence on the health and the capacity for survival of the particular individuals under examination. These, I thought to myself, are several of the large claims that "we" should be examining in Continental Drift, as I went to it for the third time, reading it just ahead of the class, in November, and deciding what to emphasize.

But pause for a moment. In advancing claims, I am thinking of three kinds of "we," and these need to be explained. Because even though one of these kinds makes the largest claim, it is important to see where the other two come in.

Novelist John Barth observes that "most people read novels for entertainment and delight." And, he adds, "most novels are read only once." That might describe the Book-of-the-Month Club reader. "We" as professional readers recognize ourselves in the first sentence, but not in the second. Like BOMC readers, we come for entertainment (if not for "sheer" entertainment) and for delight (if not for "escape")—the professional reader does have a soul, or facsimile, even a heart, sometimes tearducts. At the climactic moment when Bob Dubois' unhappy life finally collapses, plunging him beneath the realm of humanity, we have seen him move—in credible stages—from bored repairman to frightened liquor store manager to captain of a fishing vessel used for illegal immigration. Spotted by a Coast Guard cutter, he and his Jamaican crewman will be jailed if caught with their human cargo:

[T]he Jamaican is now bodily hurling the Haitians into the sea, one after the other, the old man, the woman with the two small children, Vanise and her child, the old woman. He's clearing the deck of them. They weep and cry out for help from God, from the loas, from Bob, who looks on in horror, and then they are gone, lifted up by the dark waves and carried away toward the shore.

It is a terrible moment, and "we" can and do respond.

There is, however, a second type of "we," apt to call this scene "lurid" or "gratuitous" or "melodramatic," even though the BOMC reader and the professional reader unite in feeling it controlled, plausible, even inevitable. This second type of reader is the book reviewer, particularly in a medium such as the New York Times Book Review. The reviewer reports in a formulaic way, beginning with two or three paragraphs reminding (or telling) us about the novelist's earlier work. We take for granted that the reviewer (a) is interested in this particular novelist, (b) has just dutifully reread several of the novelist's major previous books, (c) is determined to render an evaluation of the new novel in terms of a continuum established by the novelist's previous works.

And in that continuum repetition will stand out. Has any reviewer, for example, in the last few years, not commented on the "preoccupation with violence" in the novels of Joyce Carol Oates? Repetition rather than "rightness" seems to command the reviewer's attention. True, the aggregation of violence in Oates's oeuvre, or even within a given novel, is interesting from a synoptic or statistical point of view, but it does not really help us understand whether instances in a particular novel are appropriate or gratuitous.

The third type of "we" is of course the professional reader; "we" are in part the BOMC reader (seeking pleasure) and also the reviewer (seeking continuum), but we think, finally, of ourselves as seeking something else besides an evening's gratification or the repetitions and advances in a career. We are always and chiefly engaged in one central issue: What Is Going On In The Novel These Days?

The Cresset
This is not unlike a large-minded novelist asking the question of what is going on in America these days. It is like the professional political scientist (not the average network TV commentator) asking what is going on with the American judicial system these days. Or the informed observer of a new building judging not only esthetics and function but asking what this building tells us about architecture these days. We always wish to study the single achievement, but more than that we wish to know, to know what is going on in a particular craft. Particularly we wish to see new ways of solving old problems, and we wish to see evidence that imagination has not died.

Neither one casual reading of a single novel nor reading of a novel in terms of the novelist's career can situate a reader for making one large claim for a book: that this book tells us news about its genre and about the human imagination.

The Washing

Stamping red dirt into the gap of ground
Where once the lilac bush had bloomed,
He paused to fix upon his wife's long stretch
At the clothes line.
"Sheets take better to the wind," she'd say,
Her words summing up to him of late
Their love in boldface,
Making him feel she'd maybe like to scrub and air
The whole of it—now that the boy was gone.
It was the boy's shirts she was pinning up—
Limp, broadcloth ghosts of other times.
The two of them had been to see him again,
And he'd grasped the cigarettes,
Clamping his lips tight round one,
Then stilled once more,
No flick of knowing in his eyes.
Always the day after she hung the wash,
Stoic, unaware of his following the easy
Lift and fall of her breasts against her arms.
He watched this now and patted the soft earth,
Thinking of planting another lilac there,
And in a rush of egoism
Catching the loveliness of its scent.

Lucy Shawgo
NATHAN LERNER:  
THE RE-INVENTING ARTIST

Artists can have any of a wide range of talents and gifts. Some create their art with surprisingly few talents but with a lot of hard work. Others have only the gift of self-promotion. One of the rarest of all talents is the ability to keep renewing one's art, to re-invent oneself over and over as an artist, to keep growing as an aware human being.

Nathan Lerner is one of those rare artists. Born in Chicago in 1913, he has traveled the world, but Chicago is still "his city." He studied to be a post-Impressionist painter, but photography seemed to come naturally. His first photographs in the exhibit date from 1932, when he was nineteen. By 1935 he had taken one of his most famous photographs, *The Swimmer*. Photographed from above, the swimmer appears to be diving through space itself. The

Robert Kostka is a painter, graphic designer, teacher, and art critic.
Beautiful Girl, Chicago 1936
light reflections on the water's surface become flames, and we are aware of archetypal man moving through the unity of opposites—fire and water.

The hard reality of that time was the Great Depression, its social and economic upheaval, and the camera seemed ideally suited for documenting and communicating the human despair that characterized the age. Nevertheless, as Lerner has remarked, there was a spirit of compassion, of "everyone being in it together" that is missing from our current social crises. Epitomizing the era are his photographs of the Maxwell Street area, a colorful open air market now almost totally gone.

During this time Maxwell Street was a melting-pot of races and nationalities, a mixture of vendors, push-carts, gypsy fortune-tellers, new and used objects of all sorts, as well as food prepared on the spot. Over 300 photographs reaffirm the sadness and hope, the simple humanity that marks survivors. As a photographer, Lerner evoked interactions and open acceptance with his subjects, an achievement that was possible then, before today's suspicious fear of the documentary photographer. The 1936 photograph Beautiful Girl shows such trust and acceptance clearly, as does the wit of Uncommon Man, a chipped...
plaster bust of Lincoln placed in an open car, as a passenger. Lerner is no disinterested observer.

In an unprecedented period of enrichment, World War II brought the best minds from Europe to this country, with a corresponding impact on every art form, on science, philosophy, medicine, and literature, as well as education. Based on the principles and techniques of the German Bauhaus, a new kind of school opened in Chicago headed by Moholy-Nagy. While most art schools were still drawing from plaster casts, the New Bauhaus students were exploring all the senses, the role of life itself in the growth of form. No difference was made between the "fine arts" and the design of communication, everyday objects, low-cost housing, made available to all by making use of industrial techniques. It may be difficult for students today—when the current fashion in study seems to be Avarice 101—to understand the kind of idealism that characterized the New Bauhaus students and faculty.

Lerner began exploring product design, and his photography took an important new experimental direction. Moholy-Nagy, famous for his own photography, stressed the role of light in creating space, tracking and defining...
motion, as a symbol of life itself.

Lerner was one of the first students, and formed the Light Workshop. In the 1937 *Light Volume*, simple elements were placed in a black box, and lit to create depth and volume—space itself. There was much talk about the space-time concept; at the time it was mysterious, but only thirty-two years later it would take us to the moon.

Lerner photographed patterns and rhythms in such images as *Cakes in Window*, 1937, but is perhaps most closely identified with a theme that continues to appear in his current work—the act of seeing itself, process and symbol, characterized by the Eye. He experimented with mirrors that combined images, textures on skin, other single negative collages. A human eye amid barbed wire, an eye in a bed of nails, for instance, were powerful pacifist images as World War II loomed. It is difficult today to imagine the impact that a tight close-up such as *Closed Eye* had in 1940. Close-ups are now a norm in advertising imagery, but at the time this photograph appeared it had a stunningly new quality. In Lerner's work the eye as symbol is found everywhere, an archetype. The
Eye on Window, New York 1943
classic *Eye on Window*, 1943, resurfaced again and again, as in *The Shopping Bag*, taken in 1976 on the Tokyo subway.

The school, by this time known as The Institute of Design, was on the leading edge of both design and photography, and contributed to the acceptance of photography as a serious art form. Lerner, who both taught at the school and was its Dean of Students, had his first one-man show in 1973, forty years after beginning his work as a photographer. Though the current fashion is to become a "Star" as quickly as possible, surely the art that matters is mature art.

During the last decade Lerner has frequently photographed in Japan, evoking abstract forms or such "found collages" as *Mishima*, 1978. Fragments of many posters rotting away reveal Mishima in his military uniform, worn in his famous suicide. Lerner's photograph reveals Mishima's lingering presence, recognizing its synthesis with other elements, making us see it for the first time. And we have returned to the idea of the artist ever renewing and reinventing his art.

*The Shopping Bag, Tokyo 1976*
Letter from Ireland
Albert R. Trost

Ireland looks great! It is green (tending to brown this summer because of the unusual heat and drought, but still greener than anything we are used to) and uncrowded. Better than almost any other place in Europe it has preserved its natural heritage, and lacking the experience of modern full-scale war that has afflicted much of the rest of Europe, its old buildings are fairly well preserved as well. From medieval castles and religious sites through Georgian residences in Dublin and Cork, to the less glamorous reminders of its Victorian industrial past, there is plenty of Irish tradition on view. If one is satisfied with public transport and accommodations in bed-and-breakfasts, travel in Ireland is something of a bargain. It should be swarming with tourists. It is not.

What is true of tourism is generally true of the Irish economy as a whole. A bright and scenic surface conceals a grimmer reality. This summer Ireland and the rest of Western Europe are abuzz with talk of 1992 and the prospect of greater European unity and prosperity. However, almost twenty years of membership in the Common Market has brought Ireland little more than greater subsidies for its farmers. A one-time tourist, in Ireland for a week or two, would be favorably impressed with scenery that looks every bit as good as it does on those Irish calendars, and with the optimism of this talk about 1992. The reality is a country which a newsmagazine titles, "the poorest of the rich."

Of the twelve nations in the European Community or Common Market, Ireland has the third lowest per capita GNP. Only Portugal and Greece are lower. Of the richest—the northern nations—Ireland is the poorest by this measure. Among the nations of the European Community, only Spain has a higher unemployment rate than Ireland's percent. As a proportion of its GNP, Ireland has the biggest public debt of the twelve nations.

It would be hard to convince the casual tourist, or many Irish-Americans who have never visited their country of ancestry, that this is the actual state of affairs. I do not know of another European country so misperceived by Americans. The popular image of Ireland in America seems to consist of equal parts of calendar photographs by Jill and Leon Uris and boisterous good times in Chicago bars on St. Patrick's Day.

To explain why the reality is so different would take a book, but in the confines of a letter, I can give two important factors in Ireland's economic failure. One is obvious to the arm-chair peruser of a European atlas, the other requires lengthier acquaintance with Ireland's history and its people. To treat the obvious first, Ireland is an island fairly far removed from the continent of Europe. Though Britain is only a few hours away by ship, reaching France requires a long day's journey. The whole island of Ireland contains about five million people: one and a half million are in Northern Ireland (a part of the United Kingdom) and three and a half million are in the Republic of which we are speaking. That is simply not enough people to sustain an internal market for many products, and Ireland is far enough away from other markets to make transportation costs a major factor. It simply costs more than goods are worth to import and export them, and Ireland's high labor costs do not make it immediately attractive to manufacturers as a base for their operations.

The second factor is Ireland's recent history of anti-colonial struggle. Ireland lives next door to its former colonial master, from which it broke away in a bitter conflict only seventy years ago. Because of the proximity, Ireland has more of a struggle for its own identity and pride than most new nations, and this consequent anti-colonialism determines much Irish policy. To further its own identity, the Irish government encourages writing and speaking in Gaelic. Most official signs in Ireland are in English and Gaelic, and every student must study the language in school, and pass an examination in it for entrance to the universities. The struggle for a separate identity has also determined the Irish foreign policy, which is non-alignment. Because
Britain belonged to NATO, Ireland felt it could not join. Ireland also tends to side with Third World non-aligned nations in the United Nations. These policies have relatively minor price tags, especially the Gaelic language instruction, but they are not the main economic consequence of Ireland's colonial legacy.

In fact, the major problem for Ireland has been that, since the early 1950s, it has tried with all its government's might to enjoy the same lifestyle as its former master, but without the same inheritance of industrial investment and natural resources. What public and private sectors had managed together in Britain, Ireland attempted to do with government spending alone. It tried to emulate Britain's welfare state. To do this, the Irish government overborrowed and over-taxed. Today Ireland has Western Europe's highest standard value-added tax, its highest income tax on average citizens, and close to the highest excise duties and corporation tax. The average single male with no allowances would have almost 66 percent of his pay deducted on income over $15,000. Employers also have to pay to support a high level of Irish social services. The cost of doing business, or of working in Ireland is simply too high. Businesses leave, and so do workers, especially those with the highest earning potential.

If one overlooks the faults in its financing, Ireland has been fairly successful in emulating Britain's social services. The products of its educational system compare favorably with Western European nations. Its unemployment benefits are so good that they are practically a disincentive to find regular employment. In the past, there have also been generous subsidies for rural housing, and thus, for the most part, houses in rural Ireland look great, certainly on a par with lower middle class suburbia in the United States. The prosperous look of the countryside, and the well-educated young people the tourist is likely to meet in hotels and restaurants, make for a good surface appearance. Government spending has produced impressive-looking results.

The city of Cork, second largest in the Republic, is representative of Ireland's assets and its liabilities. The "beautiful city by the Lee" lives up to its reputation. Well-scrubbed public buildings and churches, most from the 19th and 20th centuries, line the banks of both branches of the River Lee from the town center. The main streets are broad and clean, like those in Paris, crowded with people and lined with shops and banks. There is new construction—shops, offices, public buildings—going on. The only real skyscraper in Cork stands alone on the city limits and is the county government building. So the city is handsome and attractive, but its looks do not suggest the over 20 percent unemployment rate. Three major industrial companies have left the city recently: Ford, Sunbeam, and Dunlop. There have been no comparable replacements. Cork does have two breweries and a distillery, but their products go only to an Irish market. Only a few gypsy-like "travelling people" suggest poverty, but in material terms, Ireland is poor. In contrast to its colorful, bright landscape and its friendly, open people, Ireland's economy could use some cheer.

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**Truth**

Well, there it is again, 
the drowning eyes still halved and quartered - so - past bars our ancient jailer guards, 

or pinned by sun’s 
white thumb against the valley floor until the wind recalls 
it from the ridge once more, 

or swimming through our 

morning mirrors, still distorted. 

But hear it! Always clearly, 

hear September rain through 
rusting orchards, muffled drums 

behind the altar, dusk’s last 
mothersong, sudden sighs down 
empty alleys, the beggar's laugh, 
an infant's cry, the child's 
question, when we listen.

Lois Reiner
The First Amendment and the Flag
Bruce Berner

The Supreme Court's flag-desecration decision, *Texas v. Johnson*, has set off a storm of reaction: articles decrying the decision as an outrage; calls for curative legislation and/or constitutional amendment and/or impeachment; general harrumphing. My main objective is to locate the flag-burning issue within the basic structure of freedom-of-expression analysis and sharpen the question; my subsidiary objective is to argue briefly that the decision was correct.

Gregory Johnson, as a participant in an anti-Reagan, anti-nuclear protest during the 1984 Republican Convention in Dallas, burned an American flag while singing, "America, the red, white, and blue, we spit on you." Official response to this delightfully crafted composition—in sonata form, no doubt—remains unknown, but the flagburning prompted criminal prosecution

under this Texas statute:

Desecration of Venerated Object:
(a) A person commits an offense if he intentionally or knowingly desecrates:
(1) a public monument;
(2) a place of worship or burial;
or
(3) a state or national flag.
(b) For purposes of this section, "desecrate" means deface, damage, or otherwise physically mistreat in a way that the actor knows will seriously offend one or more persons likely to observe or discover his action.

His conviction was reviewed by the Supreme Court, which held, 5-4, that the statute's application to Johnson violated the first-amendment protection of expression.

The decision was neither "a departure from 200 years of history" nor "inevitable," as characterized by two nationally syndicated columnists from opposite ends of the political spectrum. The Court had never ruled squarely on the issue, though dicta assuming the government's power to so regulate appeared in judicial opinions of such well-credentialed civil libertarians as Earl Warren, Hugo Black, and Abe Fortas. On the other hand, leading constitutional law authorities (John Hart Ely of Stanford and Laurence Tribe of Harvard, among others) state that flag-desecration statutes can only achieve the result its proponents desire. But it would not produce theoretical coherence unless the discourse of public or ratification debate articulated some larger principle which could explain and accommodate both the first amendment and the flag amendment. Nothing in the dissenting opinion suggests this larger principle other than a tour de force that the flag is "special" or "unique." It is a very special, unique, revered symbol, but this does not begin to explain why it should be placed outside the first amendment. Indeed, many believe that a large part of the flag's uniqueness is the majestic, calm assurance with which it tolerates bitter dissent.

At the heart of protection for expression lies the notion that, on balance, it is best to expose all ideas, however contemptible, to the open air of "the marketplace of ideas." Rather than imprison those who speak the thought we hate, this marketplace will often drive them into ideological bankruptcy, can render them, in Justice Douglas's words, "the miserable merchants of unwanted wares." And while we do not shut up Gregory Johnson, neither do we still the voice of Copernicus. Speaking in the 1945 decision banning compulsory flag salute, the Court, through Justice Jackson, stated: "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism,
we shall call these direct regulations (the effect of their dissemination) but nevertheless incidental. Regulation D aims at noise abatement, not at the message or its effect) but nevertheless incidentally abridge communicative opportunity—both the nonexpressing teenager with a boombox and the expressing electioneer with a loudspeaker are prohibited by Regulation D. This is an indirect regulation of expression.

In cases of indirect regulation, the Court essentially balances the benefit of the regulation (quiet neighborhoods) against the incremental costs to expression (the electioneer must get the word out in other ways); but, because first-amendment interests are involved, the balance is conducted, in Professor Kalven’s colorful phrase, “with a thumb on the scale” in favor of expression. Notwithstanding the "thumb,"Regulation D has been found constitutional; likewise, Regulation B (no writing anything on the Washington Monument) properly preserves a unique national landmark and avoids the cost and trouble of sandblasting or other repair even though it removes a channel for communication, be it "Down with the Government" or "Patti loves Johnny." The Court upheld Regulation C (no burning draft cards) only upon a showing that the destruction of cards, whether done publicly for expressive purposes or privately, hampered the administrative effectiveness of the Selective Service System.

Not surprisingly, the Court views direct regulation with much more suspicion. Although the first amendment is not "absolute" in even these cases (witness defamatory speech or falsely shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater), the governmental interest in the regulation must be powerful or "compelling" to support it, as with speech carrying a "clear and present danger" of inciting to riot. To extend Kalven’s metaphor, the Court calls on itself, in direct regulation cases, to stand on the scale in favor of expression. (This is another good reason not to appoint judicial lightweights.)

Regulation A (no writing communist slogans on the Washington Monument) could not pass muster. Note that it explicitly regulates a particular brand of political expression. What legitimate interest does the Government have to keep "Hooray for Stalin" off the monument that would not also seek to exclude "To Hell with the Mets"? Regulation B (no writing anything on the Washington Monument), the indirect regulation discussed earlier, would constitutionally prohibit both inscriptions even though it is aimed at neither but at preserving government property against vandalism. Regulation F (no false advertising), while directly aimed at the effect of disseminated information, has obvious compelling justification. Moreover, though commercial speech is protected, it is political expression which is at the core of the first amendment.

This two-track analytical structure raises a complicating feature: since scrutiny is much less stringent in indirect-regulation cases, regulators might try to disguise a direct regulation as indirect. Some have argued that this occurred in the draft-card-burning case, that physical integrity of the cards had nothing to do with the smooth functioning of the system but was a subterfuge to suppress unorthodox expression during the Vietnam War. Regulation E (no passing out handbills) might be advanced as an anti-litter regulation (indirect), but context and timing could indicate it is aimed at particular persons with particular messages (direct).

Regulation G (no burning the American flag in public or private), one of the proposed legislative reactions to the Johnson deci-
sion, is instructive. If its motivation were perceived as a subterfuge for direct regulation of abhorrent expressive conduct (and, come on, what else is it?), it is controlled by Johnson and, therefore, unconstitutional. If, alternatively, we naively took the proponents at their word and accepted the regulation as protecting "the physical integrity of the cloth and emblem even against its owner from destruction of any kind, public or private, expressive or not," we would have to concede that it is only an indirect regulation aimed not at expression but at preserving this cloth. So far, so good. But, the moment the regulation is applied against an expressive flagburning, the Court must weigh the expression interest (together with thumb) against the interest in this cloth. But how weighty is the government's interest in preventing people from burning their own flags in the privacy of their own homes? Is it afraid we'll run out and forget how to make more? This "interest" sounds like H.L. Mencken's definition of Puritanism: "The haunting fear that somebody, somewhere, is doing something naughty."

The Government may, of course, clearly prohibit any defacing of particular flags, like the ones on the Capitol or Fort McHenry, to preserve historical relics or merely to defend its own property. And surely the theft statute covers stealing or vandalizing others' flags. These regulations aim at any kind of misuse, expressive or not.

The Texas desecration statute is clearly a direct regulation of expression. The dissenting justices and the State of Texas concede that it does not apply to closet flagburnings but only to those public ones which "seriously offend" others. It is not sufficient, therefore, to argue that the interest in preserving the flag's dignity outweighs the interest in permitting this form of expression. However offensive and gratuitous the message of the flagburner is (and Texas concedes that Johnson was engaged in symbolic expression), the government must state a "compelling" justification for stifling it.

When the Court engages in this stand-on-the-scale balancing of direct regulation, the strength, appropriateness, or value of the expression is not relevant. All expression has the same constitutional weight—to evaluate it is to miss the whole point. Of course Johnson's expressive conduct was offensive, gratuitous, even heartbreaking. The dissent evokes this well with reference to the rich history and meaning of the flag—Francis Scott Key, Iwo Jima, parades, even the entire text of Whittier's "Barbara Frietchie": "Shoot if you must, this old grey head, But spare your country's flag . . . ." What really upsets us is that Johnson is co-opting the flag for his own purposes. Most of us believe him insensitive and wrong. Say so. Tell one another. Tell him. Tell him why. The cure is more speech, not less.

The Court next analyzed the governmental purposes for this direct regulation. The State of Texas advanced two: preventing breaches of the peace; and preserving the flag as a symbol of nationhood and national unity. As to the first, Texas already has a "disturbing-the-peace" statute and, at any rate, the demonstration was in all respects peaceful. As to the second, burning a flag makes the flag no less a symbol of nationhood. And why should Americans be interested in national unity produced by compulsion? The profound thrill at parades is not that everyone stands when the flag passes, but that everyone wants to stand.

Beyond that, long before Johnson desecrated the flag, we have trivialized it—on candy bars, advertisements, litter bags announcing "Smith for Alderman," and so on. And some desecrate the flag by wrapping themselves in it. All of this makes it difficult to accord "compelling" weight to the unique-symbol argument. It is simply not enough that flag desecration makes us feel awful.

None of this is to say that Johnson did not minimize the flag or our reverence for it. He meant to and he did. The people who claim hurt and outrage are not all posturing and cannot be responsibly dismissed as unenlightened. The first-amendment guarantee, like freedom itself, is not free. It entails real, painful costs, and some people bear more than their fair share. That we must pay these costs is a sad truth; history records that the failure to pay them reveals sadder ones.

Corrections:

The Editor regrets that footnote numbers were omitted from the text of Jon Pahl's article on antinomianism in the September Cresset. Readers who would like to know for certain where the footnotes were placed are invited to request a corrected copy of the article.
The Catholic Moment: A Critique

Paul P. Kuenning

Editor's Note: In October 1988, The Cresset published an article on The Catholic Moment by Terry Hall. Paul Kuenning responds to the same book here, and we print his remarks as an extension of that conversation in which author Neuhaus plays so vital a part.


Lutherans do not often write about the unique leadership role of Catholicism. Still it is not surprising that a neo-conservative Lutheran clergyman who calls for a return to tradition and orthodoxy within his own Church, and who stridently opposes what he refers to as the mainline liberalism of his own and other Protestant denominations, should staunchly affirm a similar neo-conservative movement within the Catholic Church. Like Cardinal Ratzinger, who was once a progressive theologian and extremely active in the organization of Vatican II, Neuhaus was heavily involved in the liberal causes of the 1960's and the early 1970's. Both have turned with a fervor seemingly fueled by the ferocity of their conversion to a conservatism which views the growing activist agenda of their respective Church bodies with sincere alarm.

The Catholic Moment further clarifies why Neuhaus has championed rapprochement with Rome as an ecumenical priority for Lutherans. He is convinced that the Roman Catholicism of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger (with emphasis on the latter) represents the best, if not the last, hope for the whole Church of Christ in the postmodern world. As one who remains a good Lutheran, Neuhaus professes this strand of Catholicism to approximate the pure traditions of the Reformation more closely than any other group within Christendom. He believes this to be so in large part because it insists over against both Liberation theology and mainstream Protestant liberalism that the Church and the world must be viewed as existing in a paradoxical relationship to one another. That this point is pivotal to the thesis which Neuhaus develops can be seen in the subtitle of his book: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World. The meaning of this concept of the "Church and the world in paradox" is by the author's own admission nearly identical to that of the orthodox Lutheran concept of the "two-fold rule of God" or the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. (p. 22 and p. 213) It is a theology which denounces Liberationists and their allies for what it perceives as their unqualified limitation of the Gospel to purely human and earthly concerns. This inadequate and severely curtailed concept of Liberation theology serves as a foil for the orthodoxy which Neuhaus champions.

In describing what he calls the "core" of John Paul's "liberationist revisionism" Neuhaus claims that the Pope "has launched a fundamental challenge to the habit of mind that pits the infinite against the finite, other-worldliness against this-worldliness, the eternal against the temporal." But the very next sentence indicates that the pontiff may have reinforced this mind set rather than challenged it. What the Pope means, Neuhaus writes, is that "the political is urgent, but it is not ultimate." He then goes on to say that the political "is derived from, and participates in the ultimate, but must never be equated with the ultimate." (pp. 228-229) Whatever else is meant by this arcane point of logic, its effect is more surely to set the eternal above the temporal, rather than draw them together.

The eternal (suprahistorical) is unquestionably of ultimate
importance in the long run. But the temporal (historical) has a short term ultimacy of its own. The sure End provides sustenance for the equivocal present. But the source and goal of life can never be separated in any qualitative manner from its present expression without violating the Biblical witness. As in Christ, the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Godhead are inseparable. While the Gospels record Jesus as pointing to the perfection of heaven as the final goal toward which we journey, they indicate at the same time that his most urgent concern was centered in the immediate needs and decisions of daily life. He professed not even to know the exact time the Eschaton would arrive. He directed his followers to "watch" and went on to describe the nature of that "watching" as the faithful performance of one's daily tasks. The clear implication is that the temporal has more urgency than the eternal, although not more importance. To deprive the present historical moment of ultimate significance, as The Catholic Moment proposes, is to separate the creation from the Creator, to deny the indissoluble connection between the finite and the eternal, the kingdom in heaven and on earth. It is, in a word, to put asunder that which God has joined together.

Those who seek to keep the temporal and the eternal united, and who therefore view themselves as instruments through which God establishes partial approximations of the heavenly kingdom on earth, are branded in The Catholic Moment as "enthusiasts" who "try to force into existence that pure community" rather than being content "to live within the paradox." Neuhaus quotes a phrase Cardinal Ratzinger used to describe the impatience of those who refuse to live within the paradox when he refers to "the temptation to premature closure... a synonym for what used to be called 'triumphalism.'" (p. 45) This "premature synthesis" by those who want to "get it altogether and to do so now" is later described as idolatry. (p. 185) Here the sharpest possible contention is leveled against the emphasis in liberal and Liberationist theology on the Biblical vision of God's kingdom on earth.

Neuhaus's basic definition of living within the paradox is to "live by faith." (pp. 32-33) What he fails to perceive is that this living by faith might be described more realistically as accepting things as they are, living with the status quo in the serene confidence that all wrongs will be righted in the coming Parousia. In this sense "living with the paradox" can be very comforting to the minority of humankind who are presently quite comfortable, but it contains little that is uplifting to the poor, oppressed, and suffering majority.

Throughout his book Neuhaus maintains that the crucial question which faces the Church until our Lord's return is that which Jesus poses in Luke 18:8: "when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?" It is a vital query to be sure, but critical to its answer is one's definition of "faith." What constitutes the full reality of faith? Can it be confined to an inner affirmation, a verbal confession of belief in a transcendent reality, or must it include as an indissoluble aspect of its fullness a practical love expressed to one's neighbor, and particularly to the one most in need? It was this latter definition of faith which permeated a lengthy treatise on this verse of scripture by the Lutheran Pietist, Phillip Spener, which he entitled "A Hope for Better Times in the Church." Spener concluded that if faith is found when the Son of Man returns, there will be also be found a better Church and a better world. By thus describing faith as inextricably intertwined with love, justification with sanctification, Spener and German Lutheran Pietism in general simply made more explicit a theological emphasis that Luther expressed but never fully developed, and which Lutheran orthodoxy quickly annihilated. The Catholic Moment follows in the footsteps of that orthodoxy.

Neuhaus contends, however, that it is only a proper balance between eternal and temporal concerns which he and the neo-conservative Catholic leadership seek to restore. His argument, as noted earlier, is that the scale has been drastically tipped in the direction of the earthly, human, practical and particularly the political, and away from the spiritual and the transcendent. He claims that what he calls "the Catholic moment" challenges this "imperiousness of the political." (p. 286)

If Neuhaus is really only concerned about the restoration of a proper emphasis, and not the delineation of a qualitative distinction between eternal and temporal concerns, then surely it is unnecessary to level anathemas at those with whom he disagrees. Once it is accepted that both of these matters are integral aspects of an indivisible whole, then why not encourage individual persons and groups to emphasize one or the other as they are inclined and inspired to do? As St. Paul writes, there are varieties of gifts and service but the same Lord and Spirit.
But Neuhaus is not inclined toward that degree of leniency. He remains the heresy hunter. He labels a Church and/or Church leaders who take sides on "political issues" as "partisan" and proceeds to condemn a "partisan Church as an apostate Church." (p. 287) It is ironic that Neuhaus expresses his fierce opposition to a "partisan Church" in such a fiercely partisan manner. Neuhaus contends the "Biblical politics" of the liberal theology which he opposes places its followers "somewhere between the Jesse Jackson wing of the Democratic party and the Juan Luis Segundo wing of liberation theology." That observation may well be correct, but his following comment that such "unconscious partisanship is more frequent on the Left than on the Right," (p. 276) is both gratuitous and erroneous. As an astute political observer Neuhaus is certainly aware that his own neo-conservatism locates his adherents somewhere between the Bush-Reagan wing of the Republican party and the Cardinal Ratzinger wing of Catholicism. In all fairness, his capable opponents are equally aware of where they stand on the political spectrum.

What Neuhaus portrays as criticism of the so-called "theology of the left" is true of every theological position. Each can be assigned to a particular place on the scale of partisan politics, which is only another way to say that Neuhaus's option for a non-partisan Church is pure fantasy. His insight that it is better to be aware of one's partisanship is accurate, but it turns out to be a stinging criticism of his own position. With a curious inconsistency and lack of logic, he fails to consider that the Church which remains silent on critical political issues is giving implicit consent to the powers that be, and therefore acting in a partisan manner on behalf of the status quo.

In his rejection of a partisan Church, Neuhaus has nevertheless touched upon important truths. He is right that the Church must never identify itself in any permanent sense with a particular political party or ideology. This is so, as he indicates, because all political parties and ideologies have only a partial application to life's fullness, and yet they tend to absolutize themselves. But this valid insight should not itself be absolutized, as Neuhaus tends to do. Occasions arise when for a limited time, in order to stand with the specific needs of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed, it may be necessary for the Church not only to speak out on the issues but actually to endorse a particular candidate, office-holder, party or ideology. This should be done only where the human need is urgent, where the Biblical injunctions are imperative, and where the support of the Church is crucial to a successful outcome. Once this specific goal is accomplished, the Church can once again resume its prophetic role of critical support and/or resistance to the political party in power. An actual example of this kind of participation and consequent withdrawal can be seen in the Church's varying positions during the recent revolution in Nicaragua.

So long as the Church as an institution wields political influence it is an illusion to believe that it can be non-partisan. If being partisan is to be contaminated, it is better to "sin boldly" than piously to protest that we are isolated from any ideological bias. As a liberation theologian once paraphrased a word of Jesus, "Let him who is without ideology cast the first stone." In the long run, the Church will solve its problem of unity within the fellowship of believers not by seeking for a place of political neutrality; such a place does not exist. Rather, it must courageously allow for the expression of differing viewpoints as part of the arduous process of determining which precise political stands should be taken.

Neuhaus attempts to alleviate the obvious cant contained in his call for a non-partisan Church by stressing the need for the laity to be involved in politics. Religious leaders and the Church as a corporate body are to remain strictly "neutral" while fulfilling their true "spiritual" role, which is to equip the laity to achieve their Christian vocation through (among other things) political involvement. Everything which Neuhaus has to say about the equipment of the saints "for the exercise of their ministry in the public arena" (p. 286) as a primary teaching role of the Church is on target. The problem is that he sets it over against any participation by the corporate Church in political advocacy.

How can the Church fulfill a proper teaching mission to its individual members in their vocational task while it ignores its corporate vocation as an advocate for the poor and the oppressed? How can Church leaders pompously instruct the laity about political involvement as a vital aspect of the life to which God has called them and at the same time disregard the prophetic elements of their own God-given vocation? The either-or dichotomy evident in the call for individual-lay participation and corporate-clerical exclusion from the political realm.
characterizes the general theological approach which Neuhaus advocates. It is God talk over against human activity, rather than spirituality issuing forth in activism. It is the grace of God over against an "insipid moralism," rather than faith becoming active in love. As a result the dogmatic and sanctimonious religiosity which Neuhaus defends is more vulnerable to criticism than the so-called "humanistic moralism" which he condemns.

For the most part, *The Catholic Moment* presents able and challenging arguments on behalf of the neo-conservative, anti-liberation theology which it defends. This cannot be said, however, for the author's repeated refrain that political involvement of the Church spells institutional disaster, which can be seen in loss of membership and funding by its disgruntled constituents. This warning is reinforced with numerous statistical data recording the declines in membership and religious vocations over the past number of years by churches meddling in politics. (pp. 191 and 263-264)

It is really inexplicable that a writer with the acumen that Neuhaus otherwise demonstrates descends to a level of analysis which scarcely deserves the name of theology. The test of the Church's real health is not based on the measure of its institutional growth, but on obedience to its God-given mission. If one takes the Biblical witness seriously then growth in membership and material assets, far from being the ultimate test of faithfulness to the Gospel, might possibly be the measure of its apostasy. The chief characteristic of a prophetic proclamation of the Gospel has never been popularity, particularly with its comfortable middle class and wealthy members. The real test of the Church's vitality may now, as in every age, be the willingness to lose in order to gain, to die in order to live again. That truth has in fact been recently demonstrated in Latin America where the Catholic Church has experienced the leaven of vitality in the poor with whom it has identified.

It is precisely where the membership of mainstream churches is primarily middle and upper class, and where the poor and working classes are largely excluded that the membership loss which Neuhaus ascribes to a "partisan church" has taken place. Incredibly, what Neuhaus has chosen to proclaim as a 'prophetic warning is that the great, white middle class and not-so-silent majority whom he calls the "real Church," and whom he claims feel "implicitly excommunicated" by "partisan politics from the pulpit," (p. 268) are going to cut back on their offerings and shake the dust from their feet in protest. Granted that this sort of warning is guaranteed to capture the attention of an institutionalized Church often motivated more by fear of material losses than by real dedication to the needs of suffering and oppressed humanity, there is little more that can be said for it. Most certainly it is devoid of any theological validity.

*The Catholic Moment* is a highly politicized defense of Catholic-Lutheran neo-conservatism. Unfortunately, the force of its argument is severely debilitated by the author's pious pretention that the theological position he espouses remains above politics.

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In November...

- L. DeAne Lagerquist on feasting.
- Mark Knoblauch on Heartland cuisine.
- Jim Combs with the last word on Moon Pies.
The Slow Learners Get Shoes for School

Three sisters, they've come with their mother
To get ready for school, and my son fits them.
He brushes their ankles and speaks of leather
Lasting, the waterproof strength of stitching.
The mother listens like someone who's learned
To hear the sense in babble. She's watching
Her daughters and counting up their comfort
When they stand, when they stumble unbalanced
By this change in size, all suddenly laughing
At the silly steps around them while my son
Says "How do they feel?" "There's the mirror"
And they begin a dance, shuffle and skip like
They're breaking them in, like they've been bought
And carried home in boxes that surprise them
Again in the kitchen where their mother will
Watch them cakewalk their share of the source
Of dance that lurches and glides, pivots and slides.
My son is speaking to the mother; he's offering
"Cinderella" and "Dorothy," and she answers,
"The three little kittens have found their mittens,"
And he tries to remember their names and fails,
And thinks, in his storybook, they had no tails.

Gary Fincke