

A Dyed-In-The-Wool Outlander

by

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It all began when Tim's Alter Ego, an incorrigible outsider or outlander, got newly incensed over some things demure idealistic Tim himself rather slighted — *the entertainment media's vivid graphic sex and violence* (the day's au courant divertissement), *the state of 'enlightened' public education* (then bent on assuring youngsters that gender didn't exist and that intelligence, as measured by things like IQ, was as mythical as beauty, and, last but not least, *redeem med culture* (essentially the recognition that being white was more or less unforgivable). Tim, unlike his prim AE, tended to quietly carry on with his job as a photographic printer and retoucher — mainly enhancing advertising copy — work you tend to do on your own — returning at day's end to his select reading and symphonic music while ensconced in his rocking chair, allowing imagination a joyous carefree interval. Well, in so many words. But AE was in a snit these days, making it harder and harder for Tim to sit back and savour Offenbach's Barcarolle to the Tales of Hofmann without the sorehead muscling in. Even Tim's advertising work AE was rebuking these days — 'You're just making life more molesting for the hoi polloi, dimwit.' So AE claimed. The fact that Tim was part of the hoi polloi made the scapegrace's comment disarming. So, Tim decided he'd better take a back seat for a while and let the curmudgeon have his say, hoping he'd 'take a hike' once he got some things off his chest. Though he knew AE was rarely 'off the clock'. Indeed, it was becoming harder and harder to ignore the growing number of intrusions. It seemed life was becoming more and more vexing for arch complainers, given the burgeoning number of them. A dilemma Tim had never contended with, being a hermit most of his life. His treasured classical music, which hadn't yet been redacted by the day's cultural progressives, a reliable solace. The few people who actually knew him welcomed his printing and artwork, a toil which he did on his own, coming in fact to like the isolation it provided — almost the quiet of a tranquil hereafter he sometimes mused. No noisy bellyachers to contend with — until recently of course — when his own whinger blethered forth!

Such that Tim did nothing to provoke the provocateur. His quiet taciturnity was his boon companion. When you are ugly and not too bright, you stick with a trusted collaborator. But AE badly needed an audience, and only Tim might hear him out!

Thus, what follows are some of AE's flinty aperçus, such that if the current reader is one of Robin DiAngelo's 'fragile white persons' it maybe best to beg off now. Only the fearless or daring might hang in here. Tim felt such a warning apropos when AE sounded off, for it was a harangue that might well leach out — somewhere! The curiosity was that AE, when he decided to seamlessly bellyache *this time*, should find the Outlander TV series a ready vexation — a series Tim had come to savour, indeed relish! So the onerous 'lecture series' began. From the lippy doppelgänger.

When 'quiet' Tim first learned of a TV Series called Outlander, he felt a certain affinity for the name, for it seemed a succinct description of himself as a misfit, someone ever outside, dislocated — a notion that was promptly shucked on seeing the first episode, for the 'Outlander' in question was a singular beauty few people would shun, overlook, or deem extraneous or intrusive. The actress in question, Caitriona Balfe, a former fashion model, he actually had trouble believing existed, the classically elegant beautiful face and profile, swan-like neck, gracile beguiling form, and vernal silken speech, almost that of a mindful placid child. Indeed, a ranking producer had apparently found this rara avis only after many weeks of long careworn, nail-biting searching! A rarified find indeed. Tim too beheld in Ms. Balfe a being he had never quite imagined, certainly never seen in his advertising work, and felt at sea trying to describe her. But she was real, not a phantom, and he had to knuckle down to amend his heavenly gallery. His Alter Ego was not impressed of course. "You're just another pie-eyed voyeur." Yet Tim soldiered on in his appraisal of the 'ineffable' Outlander series. (One time Time might actually use such an epithet.) "Do note, AE, as truly exceptional as the Outlander is herself, her passionate, heart-smitten life partner, who upstages her early husband, is a prince of a chap whose physical beauty, decency, strength, endurance, honour, thoughtfulness, resourcefulness, generosity, humour and kindness is surely exemplary if not unique among all the fictional heroes you and I know about, whereas the man's innate talent for coping with and surviving fearsome bloody abuse, injury and infection, is a singular mind-boggling tale in and of itself!"

"How you keep the the graphic brutality 'captivating' — for a largely jaded audience."

"Well, I'm not here to cavil with the likes of you. The series is a wonder, has in-fact sustained my happy hour, a time when wonder is allowed to breathe. Please take a hike into that fearsome outback of yours. Outlander's awesome world beckons, a cosmos of raw scenic grandeur, bustling historic settlement, colourful townsfolk,

foreboding encampments, ritual gatherings, unprecedented TV love making, poignant anguish and heartache, epic war, hovering intrigue, fitful historic chaos, plus the febrile Scottish Gaelic language — all wondrously engaging if not mesmerizing. A wonder world that rarely comes with such vivid detail. Including a paragon queen named Claire. Not something you slight.”

“A ‘queen’ who gets drawn into numerous gruesome perilous adventures, many with a porno edge that seems at times interminable.”

“Which she survives, of course.”

“You actually watch, savour such barbarity?... Do recall that your paragon male, Jamie, tells Outlander Claire early on, when he takes her back to Craigh na Dun, the time travel facility, after the witch trial, that all 1743 Scotland has to offer her is ‘violence and danger’, his very words — the show’s very *raison d'être*, yes? Your happy hour.”

Tim simply shook his head. “I’d forgotten that exchange. But there are some happy occasions. It’s not all violence and danger. Take that return to Lallybroch *following* the witch trial when they decide to *stay* together, their exemplary love for one another enough to cope with providence, ugly or benign. Claire’s happy account of the joys of flying, for instance, is a blithe mutual exchange. A compensating interval, no?”

“Oh come on. You’d put an audience to sleep lallygagging like that.”

“Lallygagging?”

“Yeah. Traipsing into a boring coziness. Who watches banal *I Love Lucy* any more?”

Tim solemnly begged off. He decided he’d better let brazen Alter Ego have his say. Maybe once the bugger got some things off his chest, got his precious ducks in a row, he might put a sock in it, and leave Tim in peace. Might.

Thus Alter Ego began an implacable, if one-sided, conversation with his stolid Other Half, an ‘indentured’ witness whose forbearance would be tried as never before. AE’s ‘frank’ talk was, as usual, unremitting.

“So, Timmy boy, seeing beautiful healthy people routinely brutalized is okay with you? A happy hour treat? The gung ho producers of *Outlander* get a pass, right? Eschewing any graphic rape or torture of *ugly* chromos — the ones usually endured to such abuse. Only flagrant ravishment of paragons here.”

“Do carry on; I’ll try not to fall asleep.”

“Well, in diligently assessing Outlander, one might, should begin by scrutinizing the presumption of Time Travel in the series, initially the fate of Claire Randall (played by your heartthrob Caitriona Balfe), your incomparable Outlander, an exceedingly pretty British army nurse who gets reunited with her husband Frank at the end of WWII. On a welcome excursion to Scotland, Claire finds herself, when gathering rare flowers near an ancient stone menhir, dramatically thrust into a historic period two hundreds years in the past. Possible? Depends on what you believe. It does seem unlikely though. A reversion to an earlier timeline means the later familiar period would be erased because it has yet to happen, no? Why would you retain vivid memories of things that have yet to transpire? You’d resemble a mindless zombie would you not? And to imagine, as intimated here, that all ages, hours, are simultaneously accessible, fragments memory, time itself. People returning to earlier times, their very presence altering what’s happening there, could render a later reality very different from the one they left. Also, seeing three generations eventually going back and forth through menhir portals — to and from 18th and 20th Centuries — is like watching straining patrons entering and departing the same latrine door — with never a ‘deposition’ in an inapt time or place — a possibility Claire herself ruefully considers at one stage.”

“Yes, that frequent transformation does get a bit unexceptional, losing some of its peculiar early haunt. But come on, it’s fiction. Where fantasy often reigns.”

“Well, Claire even worries at one stage if Roger MacKenzie, her daughter’s companion, might not exist if his ancestors fail to connect in the 18th Century — when the real Roger is standing before her. She does concede that she doesn’t know how this all works — with little demure. Do note: Claire returns through the stones in 1948, her friend Jillian goes through in 1968 — yet they meet in 1753 Leoch.”

“Well, plausibility rarely haunts rapt menacing fiction. Even I know that. And there is a fine verisimilitude to the series. The wild, seemingly pristine wilderness settings, many zestful eccentric characters, a poignant love story with few rivals in intensity that I know of, vintage dress, manners and customs, wonderfully detailed interiors, both posh and earthy, nearly seamless digitally reconstituted homesteads, castles, bustling ports, fine replicas of period ships, lush gardens and palaces — vide the ravishing Versailles simulacrum of Drummond Castle and its grounds! — the robust Scots’ Gaelic language (an organic ingredient in the story), many venerable plants and herbs, assorted territorial animals, even some elegant Friesian horses! In

addition to the wonderfully subtle, often exquisitely lyrical music of Bear McCreary! About as subtle and quietly pervasive as any soundtrack I know of.”

“Yet seeing on cable TV unprecedented detailed nude sex and convulsive sadistic cruelty — the one occasionally fronting the latter — don’t you feel prodded, ticketed, stuck in a feed lot, and disposed to note some laboured peculiarities? When you’ve got a producer who can entice pretty actors to engage in gamy acts, the sadistic sometimes plying the sexual, you got the making of a humdinger, no?”

“So, you’re suggesting we’re dealing with some canny pander producers here, and ready work for the willing, ambitious or hard up performers.”

“My favourite pander, the one in Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida called Thersites comes to mind, though his one rendering of lust with ‘Fat rump and potato finger’ may not percolate here. Still, I can readily hear the English Dragoon, Black Jack Randall (played by Tobias Menzies) saying, quoting Thersites, to Jamie Fraser, his ‘beloved’ Highlander (played by Sam Heughan) whom he yearns to brutalize, ‘I wish thou didst itch from head to foot and I had the scratching of thee, I’d make thee the loathsomest scab in...Scotland.’ He actually says ‘Greece’ instead of Scotland, but the allusion holds, I think. Black Jack is singularly enamoured of such mauling, especially of heartthrob Jamie, seeing in such vivid obscenity the creation of a ‘masterpiece’. Indeed, his language in the early Garrison Commander episode is particularly bizarre, Kafkaesque comes to mind. He begins by *actually* apologizing to Claire for assaulting her at Craigh na Dun (their initial encounter in Episode One). ‘I want to apologize... ever since our first encounter...I’ve experienced extreme discomfort after that awful day in the wood...the very memory of it leaves me ashamed.’ He tells Claire of his coming to Scotland to fulfill the obligations of a Red Coat Captain, but discovers a ‘squalid, ignorant people prone to base superstition and violence’. Curiously, he turns out to be as squalid as they come in the series— his apologetic words above most puzzling, if not bizarre — for he actually *enjoys* belting, kicking and raping women, and fervidly *abuses* gracile Claire in the course of a later ad hoc meeting. “It’s very freeing!” he debonairly says to his Corporal Hawkins who, on Captain Randal’s stern orders, robustly kicks a prone Claire in the back. (Randal has just slugged her in the stomach, after an invitation to amicably depart his presence.) ‘They’re so soft,’ Randal remarks about women in general after Hawkins kicks Clair a second time. The script writers here seemed resigned if not eager to bolster Randal’s mesmeric monstrosity. Indeed, abominable Randall lives a confident free-wheeling archly cruel

life throughout Outlander, including ready rape, and dies an honourable death on a historic battlefield! No rebuke for Black Jack in the series. Horror is more horrible when immutable, omnipotent I guess. His contradictory words to Claire truly bizarre.

“But back to our canny pander producers, who diligently showcase unprecedented sex, both consensual and non consensual — given the main producer’s wish to ‘upgrade’ TV’s past rendering of it. Which he certainly works to achieve. Black Jack’s bodice ripping of two gals including Claire, one of the inaugural debuts one presumes. Such ticklish ‘exposés’ of tits must have required a few takes to get the hectic scenes lucid for an audience, right?”

“You would note that.”

“Do recall the pertinent fact that the set ‘minders’ apparently insisted that only select members of the film crew might attend the filming of conspicuous nude and/or brutal scenes, which a million or more viewers will supposedly lucidly behold. Curiously, even the actors counted the film crew onlookers. In one TV interview Sam counts fourteen, promptly corrected by Caitriona’s sixteen — obviously the set’s conscientious body counter. Caitriona concedes in a later interview that such filming was awkward, especially when you eyed some of the ‘watchers’ thereafter. She’s also noted that the ‘modesty patches’ they wore in the many nude, love making scenes, did little to abet one’s modesty or dignity. Indeed, one wonders if she learned the specificity of these raw ‘clinches’ after submitting her demo reel to the gung ho producer, who obviously felt that blatant unprecedented nudity and cruelty a *sine qua non* for a successful series.”

“Well possibly.”

“The restricted crew who film such encounters — the privileged Dress Circle, say — does beg the question of seemly propriety.”

“Possibly.”

“To so intimately, sedulously direct exceptionally attractive actors in scenes both lascivious and sadistic is a rite of splendid isolation, no? So, am I warm here?”

“I’d say you’re, well, marinating at least. You know, I can imagine you’re the kind of smart ass who’d ask Sam Heughan, who plays the cute red-haired Highlander, if he had a favourite boob on Caitriona, the lovely Sassenach nurse he gets to frequently fondle with such apparently inaugural, exclusive candour.”

“Oh, he’d say they’re both awesome. But really, have you ever seen such overt raunch in a public TV series? So who is the prospective audience for such scenes? You

must have asked yourself that question. Are fervid voyeurs now an indispensable constituency for a successful series run, nude forms — manifest, amorous and tormented — a requisite? Is the question inane? Some sex acts themselves seem pretty reachy. That cunnilingus tryst in the old fort that Claire and her first hubby, Frank, fondly explore on a holiday in Inverness after the war, seemed particularly gratuitous. Moreover, could such a visiting twosome readily, easily explore such a unique, precious, deteriorating, historic ruin *entirely on their own?* Even busting open, and possibly damaging, an old sealed door, a door unopened for ages — *on their own?* Could they even endanger themselves by doing so — in an aging ruin? Moreover, the atmosphere inside the fort is heavy with ash, dirt, dust, and cobwebs of many decades, the door they finally push open — closed supposedly for eons. Well, when inside the newly revealed room, Claire sits on a grungy table her husband duly cautions her about — ‘You’ll get dirty’ — while giving him a come-on smile. In response to his caution about the dirty table, she begs for a ‘bath’, whence he discovers she’s left her knickers off. Remember they’ve been wandering about a pervasively grungy dirty old castle for some time, she in a loose skirt without underwear — and she an advocate for hygiene throughout the series, given her acute concern for sepsis and germs. Many, many times she cautions Highlanders about injuries getting infected, ‘inflamed’. So when Frank gets on his knees, his stylish hat carelessly cast aside by his newly avid wife, her skirt alive about his head — on an acknowledged dirty filthy table — might he not be seen spitting out bits of grit and detritus now and then as they squirm about, he slavering away, actually wiping his tongue off now and then? He is a fastidious bloke after all. Just asking.”

“Interesting. Fruit cups do vary. Some fresher than others.”

“Well, let’s just assume his saliva glands are exemplary. And that cunnilingus may now be a benediction that supersedes locale and situational detritus. As germane, if less visceral — what about having that old bed in the Inverness B & B they sportively jump up and down on to simulate humping — an impulsive incendiary lark — actually collapse with a decisive crunch? It’s amazing the springs or frame didn’t break for the couple could weigh well over 300 pounds, and they gleefully vigorously bounce up and down together on it for several seconds.”

“Hum. Wouldn’t have been so unusual I guess.”

“Another confusion. In that first Episode called Sassenach, Frank comes across as a thoughtful considerate bloke, who can imagine one or more of the Highlanders

Claire nursed in the war wanting to ‘reconnect’ with battlefield nurse Claire after the war (not unlike the one he spies in the street earlier that night). Calmly he alludes to ‘Someone in your charge, someone you’d nursed... looking for you now, trying to reconnect, wouldn’t be unusual...’ ‘Are you asking me if I’ve been unfaithful?’ Claire asks. To which Frank placidly replies, ‘Even if you had, I love you and nothing else matters. Nothing you could do would ever stop me loving you.’

Only later, when Claire ‘returns’, and describes her three year time-travel adventure, he nearly clobbers her in a ferocious fevered frenzy, his mind full of ‘rage, betrayal, hatred’ (his words!) when he learns she fell deeply in love with an 18th Century Scot and is carrying his child! Do recall Claire’s own assessment of academic rational Frank then, believing him sarcastically prone to think her time-travel story a concatenation of ‘magic and fairy dust’. The earlier idea of ‘reconnecting’ he’d so calmly thoughtfully invoked, reconciling himself to Claire’s intimate care of soldiers, and a possible liaison with one, is transformed into a murderous feral furor! Indeed, in this fit he smashes up many items in the Reverend Wakefield’s home. A theatrical bromide that’s not only boring but generally absurd. Who ever, even in anger, really smashes up valuable household goods by ruthlessly, briskly clearing a table, desk, or mantle, sending the objects crashing to the floor — here the many boxes in storage bin? Jamie’s slugging trees in an impotent rage is more realistic. In any case, I can’t help wondering what the *earlier thoughtful, considerate, equanimous* Frank may have said when he learns of his wife’s time-travel adventure, and keen aspirational love of another man such that she’s bearing his child. So instead of venting unprecedented disgust, rage, fury and threats — might the *caring* Frank not have said something like this, after a thoughtful pause say — following Claire’s detailed account of her time travel adventure.

You did earlier say ‘I’m back’ — when we first saw one another in your hospital room — without much enthusiasm I recall. Even the everyday traffic noise outside your room annoyed you, as well as the room’s radio program.’

Let’s say he pauses then to reflect on the seemingly surreal adventure he’s just heard from Claire, a hand fingering his temple as he did when considering Mrs Graham’s earlier explanation for Claire’s disappearance, which he calmly rejected. Might not the *caring* Frank, the one we met in the First Episode of Outlander, have placidly stated something like the following — following Claire’s strange narrative.

Well, I do know you've been away for some time...ostensibly met and fallen in love with an exceptional man, and now bear his child. A man you assure me you 'loved very much' — and lament having had to leave — with a candor I must take to heart. Hence, I do wonder just where I may fit, in this scenario — for I still love you, ardently, unreservedly. But, given your somber tone of voice, I tend to feel like a mere observer, a stray witness...'

I do wonder what chary Claire's response might have been. It's also hard to credit the Inverness media's sensational story of Claire's return — as a yarn full of supernatural help from fairies! Her homecoming few people would know about — making a journalist's fantasy tale a bit thick. And why would such a journalist imagine fairies brought her back? But credibility, large and small, the TV series often slight. Just for instance, why would Claire leave her modish shawl behind when she first explores her new baffling locale in 18th Century Scotland? She obviously thought it a necessity when she first set out for the menhir stones to look for her special flower. Yet she doesn't give it a thought, apparently, as she searches about Craigh na Dun for some familiar sight only to be shocked by the sound of gun shots. Moreover, why indeed would Black Jack Randall, a Captain of Dragoons, be discovered by Claire conspicuously alone, idling by a stream in a sustained quiet while his Dragoons are engaged in a murderous skirmish with Scottish Highlanders, recently punctuated by ear piercing musket shots. Yet, on seeing Claire, he rises to assault her with rape-intent ferocity while the exceptional quiet about continues. A narrative fix defying credulity, no?

"You know, that anomaly interested me as well. Moreover, I did wonder why a group of horny, sex-obsessed highlanders, her ostensible rescuers from Randall, would treat her so relatively chivalrously — and she a stray much disliked Sassenach?" 'Not a pretty thing to be,' Jamie sternly advises her soon after."

"Well they almost didn't — treat her 'chivalrously'. War Chief Dougal MacKenzie's chary curiosity about her presence, given her confounding appearance and 'stamash' with Randal, upstages any assault. Remember, these are the tolerable guys, red-haired Jamie an esteemed comrade among them — who turns out to be an early feminist paragon; my God, he'd likely pass muster with the Me Too, even the Pink Vagina Cap crowd, today! No, really. He's a dreamboat, smart, mindful, courageous, honest, patient and considerate as Hamlet's Horatio, and a virgin! Moreover, a virgin who knows how to avidly kiss! Singular traits for an unrivaled hunk in a lusty clan community being avidly pursued by the smitten, very cute, Laoghaire, no? When the Sassenach first sees him, shortly after her highlander rescue from Randall, he's most

inconveniently injured, can't ride, and risks being 'badly aide' by his fellows. She boldly, almost audaciously, attends to him with admirable success, to the astonishment of his clansmen — such that he can now ride. Further attention keeps him in the saddle. She tends to him again after they arrive at Castle Leoch, an interlude where the romance between them, though initially speculative, seems 'futured' — though, on first arriving at the castle, Jamie seems oddly restrained, coy even, about explaining Claire's presence and accomplishments to the castle's matron, Mrs. Fitzgibbons. He presents Claire as little more than a stray picked up on the road whom Dougal wants to assess. You'd think he might have been a little more informative, given his appreciation of Claire's services. Indeed, only Claire's ready recounting of his injuries prompts Mrs. Fitzgibbons to demand his cooperation. On seeing Jamie ably attended to, she kindly advises Claire to call her Mrs. Fitz. But the scene the next morning with Mrs. Fitz is truly bizarre. Mrs. Fitz matter-of-factly begins dressing doughty Claire in Scottish dress, allowing another spectacle of seeing Claire nude — entirely nude here — who somehow submissively accepts that she must shed her own stylish bra and underwear for a simple homely shift and no panties, with barely a whiff of confusion or diffidence. Even her stylish durable shoes are replaced with a stolid felt pair. We never learn what the efficient Mrs. Fitz thought of Claire's own sturdy stylish shoes, which must have puzzled such an observant woman. And why Claire would thereafter be dressed with a low neck gown, her boobs ever pushed up — unlike any other gown in the grand hall she first (and thereafter) dines in — is a puzzle. Even outdoors she's often dressed this way. I guess the panders want her décolleté throughout. In another scene, she explains how she's from the future. Terrified, Mrs. Fitz abjures her as an evil spirit and bids her begone; then the two of them are promptly, abruptly, suddenly talking to one another with the ease and trust of a mother and daughter. This anomaly is followed by another inherent curiosity worth at least a mention, for me: do we underestimate the role of stench in ecstatic sex coupling? I mean, the Sassenach appears to get washed daily, with the help of Mrs. Fitz, a Sassenach who has herself a keen sense of smell, which we're reminded of often enough, particularly when she's around Murtagh, whom Mrs. Fitz once says 'smells like a rat that's been dragged though sheep dung.' Remember, Claire's beloved spends much of his time around horses. Such folks get aromatic over time, yes? Yet Claire's more or less ecstatic throughout several of her impromptu trysts with him, even in a wilderness setting; no apparent hygiene concerns at all! Yet, in a later scene, she curtly tells young Willie,

who wants to go for a poop, to do it ‘fifty yards away and down wind’ — down wind on a mild day! Her advice to Willie curtly delivered I recall. So, given Jamie’s close living with horses, a strong odour might add a *je ne sais quoi* to sexual ecstasy in impromptu bundling, no? Just asking. One outdoor engagement was unerringly rapturous, until some English deserters intrude and nearly rape Claire. Well, strong odours do get special mention, and the generally fussy Sassenach does take off now and then to wash, wanting also a breath of fresh air, it seems. Also, Claire’s fine skin, which Mrs. Fitz notes early on, looks cleanly perfect throughout the series, unmarred, pristine and seamless as Parian marble. During the witch trial — which imposes a foisted indictment clan lawyer Ned Gowan does his best to acquit — she is confined to a filthy, dank, rat and bug infested dungeon, a ‘thieve’s hole’, yet even after spending two nights with the rats and bugs, sleeping on rocks, and suffering a brief strapping, her upper chest, bare arms, face, neck and shoulders — what we see of her, less her faintly marred back — could grace a Dove commercial! It’s the climactic plaintive scene where she tells Jamie, who’s just rescued her from the heinous trial, that she’s ‘from from the future.’” A scene about as poignant as any in the series, tears many and seemingly germane. It all ends in that short rare felicitous interval after she decides not to return to Frank but stay with her new love. So, one does wonder why such amorous heroes, so gorgeously ideal, are so persistently, cruelly and abominably treated in such minute detail? They’re never really in mortal danger of course. And mostly appear splendidly hale and rarely a day older throughout the series. Curious no? Just asking.”

“Well, you ever consider Claire may be not a little amused herself on occasion — some of the tears she exudes deriving from the laughter she stifles before coming on set?”

“Well, she is a nimble performer. Another curiosity — does she do any more depilation after that one time in France, creating tonsured legs and sex that supposedly captivated her heart throb? They really kept us in the dark on that one. Would the pain have been any worse than the punishing paddling she receives from Jamie after taking an ill advised stroll (which she *promised not* to do) that results in her apprehension by a team of redcoats? The suspense did linger. I mean, well — does she? Just asking. Moreover, her legs throughout the series, often lovingly caressed and closely, even minutely, photographed, are as smooth and white as alabaster. It would be a bit outré if not inconvenient to make that depilation episodic thereafter — a later razor edged

shriek, with or without a rip snorting tear, in a tavern room say, upstairs in Lallybroch, or in a cottage or field tent on the eve of Culloden. I have it on good authority — from limited yet articulate advisement you understand — that female pubic hair can be a trial growing out. So who knows? To tell you the truth, I was astonished she even bothered. Wasn't that lewd exhibition in the French salon, where Louise de la Tour de Rohan, a frivolous socialite friend, submits to the searing 'cleansing', not louche enough for a prudent, no-nonsense gal like Claire? Would such a pragmatic realist not find the deed humiliating, craven even? Her colluding with such prurience seems out of character — yes?"

"One might think so, yes; nor would she want it to become routine, surely."

"Well, there are no further ear-piercing shrieks or tears, so we may presume her honey pot's curlicues continue sprouting alive and well in settings conducive to rapt impromptu humping. And Black Jack Randal's private interrogation of her in his Fort William tower office, a fine literal bodice ripper and nipple-tipple with a sharp blade, is another of the highly esteemed tidbits for the voyeurs, one must assume. One does wonder how many times the Dress Circle had to shoot that scene 'to get it right' — like how indented the blade near or on the nipple should be, whether a bit of blood might be apt...okay, okay, okay just asking."

"Once again."

"Well, the scene does scotch belief, no? Being as sudden and dramatic as it seems. Besides, avidly ripping apart female bodices seems a 'burlesque' of Black Jack's own generic lust, as well as a waste of time with Claire. If getting the truth out of the Sassenach is the key here, to confirm his suspicion about Jacobite intrigue, why not just briskly, forcefully hold the lady's hand over a candle flame, no? Both prudent and expeditious, yes? And why bother with her in any case? Threatening her so persistently to provide evidence of Jacobite collusion among the clansmen, seems a contrived theme, for Dougal's dramatic showcasing of Jamie's scarred back to win funds for 'the Jacobite cause' is blatantly apparent in many communities and venues, as is his focus on a Jacobite restoration in Castle Leoch. Surely Black Jack could have found a needful, willing stoolie or two, long before the arrival of Claire — if Jacobite intrigue was as prolific and ubiquitous as he believes. He could well have bribed some of those same poor village tacksmen, tenants, cotters to do his bidding — be on the look out for Jacobite sedition. Some would surely have welcomed a handsome perk. Members of the ruthless Watch might also have provided some details, being as mercenary as they

are. And why is Black Jack so often so conveniently *alone* with Claire — most other redcoat officers and subalterns off elsewhere, actually ‘fighting rebels’ on one occasion! It seems downright bizarre that Randal would have such protracted, uninterrupted time to taunt, insult and abuse her. Another matter that arises after Jamie’s daring rescue of her from Randal’s Fort William tower office — their heated dispute over her wandering off on her own and getting captured by the Redcoats. That altercation deteriorates into a spat between an insufferably bossy husband and resentful wife. A simple comment from Jamie to Claire that she had in fact *broken* her promise — to stay put with Willie — would have given the encounter a different tone, a ‘promise’ being a precious value they shared.

“Heretical questions those, I imagine. Anything else?”

“Well, I *have* noted, despite what you may think, that there are many pluses in the series, yes — which one should honour. Yes. I do happen to think the talent of the actress who plays the elegant stubborn Sassenach, Caitriona Balfe, considerable, yes, really, as do you — one must give credit when credit is due — for she makes some of the absurdities almost invisible at times. What other actress could thrive in so many improbable quirky scenarios? She surely must come on camera some days with tongue in cheek. She is after all portraying an extraordinary, clairvoyant, resourceful, courageous and daring individual weathering all manner of menace, abuse and insult, a roll she imbues with intelligence, wit and pluck, in a soft plush canny voice, as you’ve noted — except when she’s vexed — that is highly seductive. Her nursing deeds in the L’Hopital des Anges in Series Two and the loss of her own baby there (filmed in the Glasgow Cathedral crypt) are as poignant and unassuming as the scenes get in the series; indeed, her several appearances there may be the most elevated, patrician part of the early series, akin to the vivid recollections of her haunting WWII deeds as a dedicated field nurse on the eve of the battle of Culloden, acute war scenes that touched even a troll like me. The Episode conjointly called The Battle Joined also has some stellar moments, particularly those where Claire struggles to be an exemplary conventional wife to Frank Randall in modern Boston (her prolonged domestic ‘battle’). One scene, while she listens to a singularly smug chauvinist windbag declare Harry Truman a huge disappointment compared to Thomas Dewey, prompts her to suggest to the windbag that Truman may still be a viable candidate, citing an editorial in the Globe — giving one a glimmer of her dignified presence and careful observance of America. While she stoically, if not whimsically, listens to the chauvinist’s seamless

innuendo about female ineptitude, her performance here is superb, truly — the face of a savvy Athena listening to an insufferably smug Zeus. Indeed her acting, throughout this episode, struck me as exemplary. If there is a more poignant rendering of a troubled wife attempting to ‘fit in’ I’ve yet to see it — my examples drawn from a relatively small aggregate of course. Still, it was an eye-opener for me. That one segment called ‘Rent’, when she accompanies Dougal on his clan tithe-collecting rounds, also struck me as extraordinary. We get there a very poignant look at how unrelentingly bleak and acerbic life can be for common folk in 18th Century time and locale, and the realism is daunting. Surprisingly, she has a cordial encounter with some hardy clan women there — while they’re ‘waulking’, cleansing and thickening, wool — a scene poignant, touching, and instructive about such women’s daily toil, which the women there appear to cope with via an innate, private, sustaining sorority! Not seeing more of this community was disappointing, the characters there finely realistic and fully engaging. As is the seamless, often bawdy Gaelic language throughout Rent — though she’s always seated apart from the others — which seems a ploy to contrive the Sassenach’s isolation, a ‘condition’ she counters with some mindful and consequential conversations in English with educated and agreeable Ned Gowan, the clan lawyer! Though it seems unlikely, given her schooling and training as a nurse, she’d be familiar with the esoteric mystical writings of John Donne, let alone have memorized his poem about Absence, which her recitation of opens the episode. Ned Gown might well know Donne’s work — but utilitarian, practical Twentieth Century Claire? That poem here is likely the conceit of a script writer for I can’t find it anywhere in the novel. In any case, her largely ‘solo’ performance in this segment — mainly away from her Highlander — struck me as truly exceptional. Indeed, her canny humor eventually alerts and charms her wary Highlanders — a befriending happenstance that earns her the admiration and trust of her Highlander cohorts. Moreover, she looks as sovereignly beautiful in this segment as in any, I think. And she is a wonder. Also, her contending with the Typhoid epidemic aboard the British Man of War in Series Three, is surely a cut above the many harrowing adventures she outlives. After all, it does get a bit tedious — all the bromidic sadistic menace/terror/assault routines. And what mystery is there in knowing the heroine will survive regardless? Nary a lasting injury, telltale scar, or broken bone despite many precipitous skirmishes, blows, vicious kicks and sudden steep unmitigated falls! The story minders have so much to work with, why then they bother with so many gratuitously nude,

flagrantly sordid, visuals? Is the extra audience needed to guarantee success of such a series dependent now on stark, gamy ‘realism’, such that actors need wear ‘modesty patches’ at times? You do feel a bit let down. Not much mystery in watching endless raunchy clinches or a gruesomely protracted flogging. Is ‘al dente’ pornography replacing ‘soft’ in an ‘aspirational love story’ (Caitriona’s modern TV characterization), now indispensable to garner a modern TV audience? And what will future pander producers do when such protracted nude scenes, amorous and ugly, become commonplace — as they surely will. Will ‘modesty patches’ become needless inconveniences in the future?”

“So, despite all, you concede there is some deft work in the series.” Tim was pleased AE noticed several things he’d slighted. Indeed, AE’s concessions would enhance Tim’s musing later while listening to his symphonic classics in his rocker.

“Well,” continued AE, “the sterling scenes never eclipse the stinkers for me. The spanking punishment meted out to the ‘careless’ Sassenach by her beau husband in Series One was another of the Dress Circles exclusive coups. Imagine a Benny Hill delirium here in an audience member as an exceptionally beautiful woman, all but naked, her pretty bum a limpid display feature, bounces about on her Highlander’s lap as he smites her with a sturdy folded belt. (Couldn’t he as easily have paddled her through her light shift?) In short: Disobedience Up Ended, not to be confused with Hitting on a Woman. Enough said. As inimical was the session in Wentworth Prison devoted to the gay, sometimes squinty-eyed Dragoon, Black Jack Randal, gruesomely, leisurely torturing and buggering the handsome bare ass Jamie, again in livid graphic protracted detail, at one point driving a nail through his hand, burning a personal crest into the lad’s chest, and further tormenting him with the captain’s own dark hair strands which he intimates belong to the Jamie’s wife. We’re even treated to a second take of Black Jack masturbating — full-frontal — more of the memorable displays, in addition to his own unique total frontal nudity. The minders of that torture session obviously took their time — the cumulated segments lasting almost an hour — to, in effect, ardently flog a tethered horse. Why was the scene so avidly staged and so mercilessly prolonged? After all, Black Jack is never given a chance to savour lashings or torment visited on himself, surely a missing diptych is his ‘masterpiece’. Also, could Jamie, a mere mortal survive such a fearsome bloodying in a filthy prison cell, or the earlier double flogging to the bone, for that matter? So I ask you: *Is* the white cis-gendered male, one of the age’s newest outcasts, germane here, particularly if

exceedingly handsome, and a monstrously sadistic gay the approved agent of retribution? Does Black Jack's preciously fabricated emotional predicament, as self-serving as they come, invite then clemency — an excuse for all and sundry wayward malcontents? Moreover, when such acutely raw TV spectacles become routine, as they will, what new outrage will be needed to garner a growing, sensation-expectant audience? Are media sharpies now so venal, expecting all actors to cede to their swank self-important notions of entertainment for a growing, happily voyeuristic, if not furtively vengeful audience? Is once admired elegant understatement now so alien, inapt, irrelevant? So unfeasible? After all, the ‘naughty bits’ are becoming nearly whole entireties. Indeed, one might well ask what ‘naughty bits’ actually means today. Among animals, humans have no real rivals as a deliberately cruel and vengeful species. The more beady of these could well find a gratifying treat in the spectacle of the young, exceedingly cute, naked Geillis Duncan being dragged off to be burned alive as a witch (a fate Claire escapes by the skin of her teeth). Historically, most witches were not young, flawless, cream-coloured dollies. Indeed, severe ugliness could be a sign of perversity.”

“Hadn’t thought of that. A sobering fact that intimates how obsessed the video makers sometimes seem here. The ‘conscientious’ toilers. Flagrant acts becoming routine, thus requiring ‘upgrading, embellishing’ in due course.”

“And with graphic display now as detailed and gorgeous as it is, is the race now on to conjure the most outrageous, egregious displays ever? After all, our day’s real ghoulish murderers, rapists, arsonists, torturers, vivisectionists, head hackers, cage burners and inventive pig feeders, to name a few select perps, can and do draw audiences, and scenarists who cater to such audiences. Though drawing attention to the cruel excesses of non-white zealots can be construed as culturally insensitive, in our woke era. While one can blatantly film excruciating pornographic abuse of *Western* actors, particularly exceptionally pretty *white* actors, and praise for your courageous artistic realism floods in.”

“You tell ‘em. Incidentally, I thought that uniformly blood thirsty crowd at the witch trial, which the story minders rendered so abysmally pitiless and incendiary, wryly suggests why British anxiety about such ‘braw Scots’ may not have been entirely miscast.”

“Well, the Brits are generally depicted as the sordid heavies in the series — as the fortunate and successful often are depicted today, no? The ones who haven’t yet

'checked their privilege', begun scourging themselves, or committing suicide — the 'honourable out' for some modern adepts. And we're barely through the rakish first two series. The reunion of Jamie and Claire in Series Three, after their twenty year hiatus, is another super-fly Hail Mary. Watching the two striving to make even the sheets sing in Jamie's upstairs bordello room is but a repetitious enactment of their early Come Kingdom climaxes — their bodies hardly look a day older, after all! — and concludes with Claire jauntily asking Jamie about his current career options: highway robbery, kidnapping for ransom, petty thievery — she rules out piracy because of Jamie's ready sea sickness — resourceful pimp, printer of seditious material, career paths for the prized, ached-for 'aspirational' partner she's left friends, safety, a sturdy career and beloved daughter for! As she enumerates this career list she mimics, so help me, a teen enjoying a delirious snap chat. Are the possibilities so jocose, amusing, so nugatory? So inconsequential? She then joins the bordello prostitutes in amiable banter, allowing herself to appear as one — in the very den she was initially embarrassed to find Jamie residing in. She seems then oblivious of the earlier many-too-many perils she escaped by the skin of her teeth — another of which explodes the moment Jamie leaves to attend to more wildcat business. An excise officer, searching for incriminating evidence of Jamie's business dealings, attacks Claire, is accidentally knocked out in the struggle, only to prompt saintly Claire to diligently see his injuries are not fatale (which they proved to be), while seemingly oblivious of the fact that if the agent survives, Jamie could well end up being charged with sedition, a capital offence, and hanged! The episode concludes with a fire in Jamie's Edinburgh print shop and return to Lallybroch — a return that is so calamitous Claire almost precipitously leaves — for ever! She becomes particularly distraught when she learns that Jamie has married Laoghaire — the lass who nearly had his true love burned at the stake as a witch. (Just how Laoghaire imagined that vengeful act would have won Jamie's heart for her is left in limbo.) As for Jamie actually marrying the scold, Claire exclaims, 'I told you to thank her (for trying to motivate Lord Lovat's timid son) not marry her!' Laoghaire manages to delay Claire's departure by shooting Jamie with a proscribed firearm, perhaps accidentally (she was initially aiming at Claire); but Jamie, wounded, needs attention from conscientious Claire. (How callow Laoghaire would come to possess such a pistol, given the British banning of all weapons in the aftermath of Culloden, is left to the audience's imagination.) In a confrontational lull, Claire asks Jamie why he ever married

Laoghaire, then left her to live in Edinburgh. His explanation is surely one of the least credible speeches in the entire series! No, really. He insinuates that one or more of Laoghaire's past husbands may have been abusive, for she spurns his caresses. I can't live with a wife who bridles at my touch, he explains. Well: Laoghaire has always had a deliriously fervent crush on Jamie Fraser, even conspired to get Claire killed, burned alive, to get him. (Though, as noted, how that savage cruelty would have garnered Jamie's affection is anyone's guess.) Indeed, she always saw Jamie as a life partner, even trying to seduce him in private after he's married (at a choice river's edge he frequents), and remains jilted, incredulous and vengeful ever after. Consider too that the two children Laoghaire has, Marsli and Joan, are delightful, both loved and brought up well; possibly Jamie's sister Jenny intervened here. Thus, it's hard to imagine a brutish husband, or two, and fearful wife — Jamie's characterization — raising two such exemplary happy contented children. It's also hard to believe Laoghaire's ardent consuming, life-long passion for Jamie, becoming so strained *after* they're finally married, such that she actually *dislikes* his touch! The touch of a decent caring thoughtful man she's keenly, passionately longed for all her life! Far better, surely, in this scene to dwell on Laoghaire's acute sense of betrayal, her consuming jealousy. Jamie jilted her once. Would she be any less vigilant, sometimes suspicious now? What if Jamie's marriage to, and separation from Laoghaire, were accounted for to a newly embittered Claire thus:

I was alone after leaving Helwater. Adrift in an open sea. At a Hogmanay at Lallybroch, which I'd not attended since a boy, the joyous gaiety intensified with the coming of young Marsli and Joan, who invited me to dance with them! I'd never met more adorable children. When they pointed out their widowed mother, Laoghaire, standing amidst the festivities, I began to imagine actually being a father to such wondrous children, and a husband, however risky. The marriage followed. But Laoghaire never seemed assured of my devotion or fidelity. Her jealousy too often intruded when we were among groups where attractive women were present, some of whom flirted with me, such that I would face a distempered wife later. But what scored to the quick was one time when I praised your healing talent to a visiting healer, and fondly mentioned your name — an exchange Laoghaire overheard, which incited her fury. ‘She’s always here — your whore bitch cunt Claire — your Sussenach witch!’ Using your name so, pained me as much as Black Jack’s lash. Less and less could I live under such a cloud of suspicion, which only became darker in time when I sometimes censured her. I have little doubt she may have wanted me, but my life with you had poisoned her outlook. She even accused me of making love to you when I was with her — one of her excruciating accusations, for

it was partly true (as Claire later did with Frank). You were ever between us. She almost stabbed me with a dirk one night. I am partly to blame — for I never abandoned thoughts of you. I never would have survived without the sustaining memory of your sureness, skill, your lucid words, candor, adroit healing ability, your smile, your touch. A lifeline you hang on to. It's all true, despite your bemusement now. Do remember I fell in love with you shortly after I first saw you, though my life was not my own then, given the price on my head. And the expedient nature of our marriage slighted an avowal of love — initially at least. In any case, I soon could not stand being around Laoghaire, despite my fondness for the kids. In the end I took a coward's way out and left for Edinburgh and the print shop, though I do continue to provide for Laoghaire and the children. I didn't tell you earlier of this fiasco because I dreaded losing you forever if I did. Which, with your displeasure so apparent now, may happen in any case. Be assured, I will take you back to the stones myself, if that is what you wish. Though may God grant me a longer time out with you this time, an extended furlough at least, please...for I'm Duncan Kerr without you...a dead man walking. Ah...you're still angry.

As you'll recall, Claire had said, with some vehemence at one stage, 'I haven't stopped being angry!' In a uniquely sobering scene that follows, Claire actually candidly wonders if she was a bit hasty in returning to 18th Century Scotland! Her singularly daunting words, exceptionally frank if not reproachful, are voiced as she and Jamie watch Ian swimming out to Silkie Island to fetch the box of MacKenzie treasure that Jamie will use to pay Laoghaire's alimony, part of the settlement clan lawyer Ned Gown devises to keep Jamie and Claire's marriage intact. Incidentally, why Ian would not take a rowboat to the island is a puzzle — surely advisable given the treacherous current and the box he fetches being heavy with iron reinforcement. Anyway, as Ian heads out, Jamie notes that Claire is distracted, not engaging his eyes, and he's puzzled. In response, still looking away, she remarks, slowly, calmly, about her late return to Scotland, a commentary unlike any such reproof before or after in the series! *I'm afraid this was all a mistake. Coming back has been so much harder than I ever imagined. I'm not sure we belong together anymore.* A brief dramatic pause follows, then: *It wasn't the plan, but I had a life, we both had lives. I had a home, family, career, friends...I didn't hate Boston. You had your print shop. It wasn't all that bad, was it?...* This poignant declaration is *uniquely alien* in the first five seasons, and tends to indemnify memories of being gruesomely assaulted, almost burned as a witch, nearly lost on an isolated island, and, of late, dealing with an unforthcoming Jamie — poignantly so in this episode. Yet the lingering misgiving lapses when a sailing ship quite eerily arrives at the island and a boarding party seizes Ian and the treasure — no explanation for the ship's 'timely' arrival or a boarding

party on Selkie Island given. Indeed, Claire's reaction intimates a superseding worry for and desire to *rescue* Ian, who'd undertaken to retrieve the treasure on she and Jamie's behalf, such that she *stays on*, with nary a remonstrance after, making me wonder if the actors themselves, given the peculiar nature of some exchanges, indulge a few smirks now and then. Just asking.”

“Somehow I don't think they'd be that care free or diffident. Everyone seems to agree the filming was often arduous. The long days, fussy costuming and makeup, variable weather, and the recurrent vexing Highland midges.”

“Well, to continue with our ‘joy-ride’: the *re-appearance* of cutesy Geillis Duncan, the Stuart kingship’s MEGA cheer leader, in Outlander’s Part Three, is about as mind numbing as any scene gets in the series. For me. She wondrously survived being burned as a witch at Cranesmuir, and we soon see her at her home in Jamaica nude, covered in goat’s blood, strutting about as a dotty May West before one her select quarry of thralls, this time a perturbed Ian Fraser Murray. To backdrop the drama here with what appears to be a Black Obeah Rite seems slapdash, condescending even, for the Rite serves little more than a noisy edgy colourful backdrop, though Claire imagines it similar to the placid druid ritual at Craig na dun, despite the Obeah Rite’s blaring exhortations, gaudy dancers, menacing gestures, reptile head pieces, bloodletting and incidental murder — one more time when Claire’s imagination seems exceptionally deferential. The Jamaica setting does afford a happy, very beneficial reunion with Lord John Grey, the current crown ruler in Jamaica, as well as a turmoiled discovery of the Abandawe cave Geillis Duncan as the Bakra uses for her manipulative shenanigans, a tightly bound Ian MacKenzie Fraser her current pledged victim. She’s also conspiring then to kill Claire’s ‘200 year old’ daughter Brianna, via a photographer she steals from Claire, to further facilitate her maniacal convoluted scheme to place a Stuart king on the throne of England. In the protracted struggle that ensues after Claire and Jamie find and enter the cave, Claire manages to sever Geillis’s head with a machete (the apposite skull Claire and Joe Abernathy examined in their 20th Century lab before Claire goes through the menhir a third time). Please note, I do contend with some daunting thoughts at this stager, ones a crank like me must sooner or later face up to. Please bare with me. If in the Outlander series the horses look good, the feral landscape picturesque, the campfires, homesteads, sumptuous courts and gardens, elaborate court rituals, period dress and raging battles appear authentic, the characters frequently engaging, their language often arresting,

and clan leader Colum's death rivals that of Little Nell, should one belabour proffered tits, asses, peckers and gratuitous sadism? Or some later Cherokee and Mohawk Indians talking in good idiomatic English in Series Four — in point of fact, good Canadian idiomatic English? Or Dr. Claire Randal, while working in Boston, being shrouded in a stiff wig that encases her head like thick sleeveless hoodie, her hitherto-fore beautifully wavy curly hair ironed."

"So nice to know hairstyles don't escape your notice."

"Well, such details aside, my main interest is why a writer like Diana Gabaldon, upon whose books the series is based, wants her paragons treated so abominably so often throughout her books. Cruelty reigns, beautiful bods suffering nearly incessant torment — yet remain exquisitely beautiful. Is such ghastliness meted out to beautiful people what the modern fiction reader/viewer wants? No witless uglies in *Outlander* suffer as vividly, picturesquely, nor protractedly as Jamie and Claire. Is finely crafted understatement, one of the literate pluses when 'we' were in school, now so anaemic? And, as noted, what indeed does the next generation of video producers do to attract an audience accustomed to frequent, acutely detailed, mayhem, including sex scenes that warrant 'modesty patches'? Will such patches be entirely dispensed with if ever more realistic sex becomes mandatory to bag an audience? Will future audiences even give the question a second thought, my sense of modesty, seemliness, being but a historic blip? Despite all, you and I have witnessed, in Claire — the face, form, voice, deeds and thoughts of a reincarnated Rosalind, Shakespeare's beautiful, independent minded, strong-willed, composed if not serene, clever and assertive heroine. How many of those do you discover in a lifetime! But this new Rosalind has a ways to go before she pegs out (if she ever does), so — again into the breach!

"One of the lingering puzzles is why Claire and Jamie so readily abandoned the killing of Bonnie Prince Charlie — their late game plan to avoid Culloden? Only Dougal actually learns of it — overhears the plan — and is killed shortly after his attempt to thwart it. His intrusion would delay placing the murderous potion only a few minutes. Rupert, the only other person who sees Jamie next to Dougal's dead body, agrees to a two hour reprieve before he tells what he's seen (he knows nothing of the actual poisoning plan) then leaves to attend to battle preparations. In short, if Claire's potent (and fantastical) yellow jasmine had promptly been placed in Bonnie Prince Charlie's tea, as she suggested, Culloden may never have taken place. What Rupert would have made of Dougal's and the prince's untimely deaths is anyone's

guess. Jamie and Claire could have devised any number of reasons for the ‘unfortunate’ encounter with Dougal: Jamie inciting Dougal’s rage by sending his Lallybroch resident-soldiers home, Dougal finally casting him a traitor or quisling who should be killed. Whereas the Prince’s many indulgences might well have snuffed the nitwit himself! The salient point is that the consequential battle may never have taken place with the Prince newly ailing or dead. Indeed, Jamie and Claire might have lived on together in a less constrained milieu — Colum’s devised ‘neutrality’ with the British, say. Such concordant neutrality, in and of itself, might well have reduced clan recruitment and thus deterred a war. An early MacKenzie-Fraser neutrality alliance would have set a probative example for other clans, leaving any Bonny Prince recruitment drive feasibly weakened if not stymied. Recall the brief auspicious interval at Lallybroch after the witch trial when Claire *actually* imagines making a life for herself. Might not Colum’s vision of a relatively peaceful neutrality have taken root then? Well, it’s not an implausible idea, right?”

“I shouldn’t think so.”

“Now the stolid series Four of Outlander begins with the hanging of one of Jamie’s loyal mates and a flagrant attack by Stephen Bonnet’s pirates on Jamie, Claire and Ian while traveling by barge to River Run — a short time after Jamie actually saved Bonnet from being hanged! Bonnet reprises Black Jack Randal as another wanton, ingrained ogre. The family trio, now including Ian Murray, survive the attack (one of their regular companions do not) and rally at Jamie’s aunt Jocasta’s grand River Run estate where surgeon Claire riles the white citizenry there by attempting to save an assaulted black. The ensuing move to Fraser’s Ridge opens with Claire seeing the ghost of a Time Traveller named Ottertooth, who has been gruesomely killed in attempting to incite the Cherokee against white settlement — a chap before his time, apparently. Jamie and Claire soon fashion a truce with The Cherokee in their new home after Jamie kills a tribal pariah who’s been on a killing spree disguised as a bear. Thereafter, the individual episodes in the series have a settled character which the earlier series don’t, permitting some protracted conversations. Claire’s doctoring skills are ever on call, of course. A birth in a German family is competently attended to, though measles eventually kills several family members, and the paranoid patriarch provokes the Cherokee into annihilating the homestead. Lord John Grey and William (Jamie’s bastard son), now the Eight Earl of Ellesmere, visit, allowing for some poignant reminiscing. John Grey comes down with measles and spends a time alone

with Claire, who can't get the disease, while Jamie and William avoid infection by exploring Fraser's Ridge. (Claire's vaccination immunity to several diseases obtains throughout her stay in 18th Century Scotland, France and America.) The reflective, sometimes frank, candid, even reproachful conversation between Claire and John Grey was a series highlight for me. Then Brianna, discovering an 18th Century obituary that tells of the death of Jamie and Claire Fraser in a fire at Fraser's Ridge (a misleading story as it turns out), goes through the stones to warn her parents, followed by her beau Roger Wakefield MacKenzie. These two meet up and monopolize, with little respite, much of the remainder of Series Four. Their hand-fasted betrothal and graphic lovemaking after they meet borders on the droll for me: Roger's hirsute torso is rather prosaic, and Brianna's vanilla tits and bum simply more white bread nudity. Bonnet's rape of Brianna is more quotidian mayhem, while Roger's unlucky brutal confinement with the Cherokee — an unrelenting, suffocating marathon — is transiently relieved by courageous Ian Murray. Flagrant unstinting abuse does get monotonous. What the grim austere Series Four lacks is the expansive, varied, and richly detailed life in and about Castle Leoch, the beautifully varied landscape, the period villages and palaces, the many wily encounters with engaging eccentric characters and their elaborate longstanding historic rituals — all comprehensively showcased. The North Carolina Brianna and Roger arrive in is a comparatively austere wasteland, the settlements stolidly utilitarian. The couple transcend their bland presence by being gruesomely abused. The idiomatic Canadian English spoken by some Cherokee tribal elders, which resembles utilitarian bus stop chatter, reminds one of the series' expediency. The ongoing orgy of abuse goes up a notch in Series Five when Roger is gruesomely if ineptly hanged and Claire brutally gang raped while bound and gagged, a crimson knife slash across her chest. Talk about upping the ante! Her assault is provoked by the discovery of her surreptitiously fostering heterodox medical advice, especially to women on how to space or avoid pregnancy — a heresy in a male-run culture. Though fewer babies at that time, if women could avoid or delay getting pregnant, would have meant a shrinking population, given the frequency of infant deaths. The era was a precarious one for mothers *and* children, and pregnancy a needed undertaking if a population was to survive. Indeed pregnancy had an imperative it doesn't today. The suspicion of a 'malevolent' healer at large in a culture hexed by many implacable illnesses and superstitions might well sanction a summary removal. Though the particular ghastliness of the assault here, as devised,

struck this viewer as melodramatic grandstanding (more on this later). One question that gets short shrift here is the plight of pathetic men in 18th Century America (who have their own pathetic examples in today's world!) Claire contends with several such dismal but obdurate gents. Indeed, for most pioneers, a healthy sizeable family was a means to viability, stability and respect. It is so preposterous that some pioneering men, learning of an assertive meddling healer, surreptitiously instructing their women on how to suspend or pace pregnancy, might act badly, especially when they learn that an exceptionally pretty woman, one they would never win on their own, was the instigator? Would a male, discovered advancing similarly consequential advice, have been as brutalized? Yet Claire is presented as the sole victim here; indeed, her anguish ranks with the Passion of Christ — obliged as she is to heal *all* humans. One of her brutal attackers is badly injured in Jamie's pitiless retaliation, needs medical care only she can provide, a dilemma that leaves her prostrate — allowing for a very anguished break down. I realize that bringing up today's INCEL (Involuntary Celibate) question may seem contentious. Yet some contemporary, awkward, ill-favoured, poorly educated white sods are waking up to the fact that they may have little to offer a woman in today's highly expectant and recriminatory social climate! Few have good educations, viable jobs. Most are generally disapproved of if 'white', and live in a society where more and more women slight marriage *and* babies. Only paragons will do as fathers and husbands it sees. *The largely ugly men who attacked the very pretty, elegant Claire, just may be early progenitors of today's INCEL plaintiffs — guys who could choose and control a wife only when they rule the roost!* Claire's singular beauty and the general homeliness of her obdurate attackers reveals a universal disparity that transcends discord alone. Indeed, we've come so far in asserting women to be self-reliant and coequal, if not superior, that one can image a future where masculinity becomes extraneous. (I hear a chorus of ardent feminist cheers!) Genetically idealized sperm will come sooner or later, perhaps even a safe ersatz womb. So lads, the thrusting you found pleasurable, and some women at least tolerated, is now suspect, given the imputation of a pervasive rape mentality most men supposedly harbour. And any fondness you professed for your life partner may have been little more than simple egregious hustling, yes? Prerogatives are under intense review these days, including the sway of lucky endowment. Yet some verities persist. Beauty can still arrest, provoke. *Popular* rape scenes of the *ugly* and *grotesque* are oxymoronic, right? People want to see pretty bodes and canny ogres deftly abusing these same pretty bodes, a tired narrative fix

that seems indispensable today! (A certitude that undermines the notion of beauty being a myth!) The fact that Caitriona Balfe who plays Claire, is a former haut couture fashion model who spent a decade exhibiting and exploiting her nearly peerless bod and face, sometimes partly nude, is but a reminder to all you sorry, disgruntled losers that the well-endowed reign. So there. Stellar Claire's immunity from ever having to 'check her privilege' is sacrosanct, at least until in the end of the first five series. In point of fact, if you are a man who's exceedingly homely, poor, slow and has no accomplishment to speak of, celibacy or procurement may be your only options, outside of rape, in a vigilant vengeful climate. Claire's anguish at the end of Outlander Season Five is now enshrined in topical feminist litanies. Her 'recovery' the next laudable, meritorious tale in the forthcoming Outlander series one presumes and, as such, a telling example to all women having to contend with homely, lowly, lovelorn, jealous, spiteful men. The presumption that some unprepossessing white men may have helped make our modern world comfortable as it is (the often impugned 'burly white men', say) — allowing such sensational, protracted leisurely storytelling as in Diana Gabaldo's Outlander novels — is dismissed as historic myth by current woke experts. *Indeed, the historic battle of the sexes may be destined to be forlorn as Culloden itself: the enlightened retribution-seeking societal victors purging all traditional ritual and mores and the men who championed them! Hey ho!"*

"So, we await your flinty assessment of Series Six. With fine trepidation."

"While you carry on smooching your precious sentimentality."

"You're more than welcome to join in, you know. It does have its own insular satisfaction"

"Nah, too dreamy. More scrimmages await. See you."

And so an otherwise placid Tim was again left alone in his own world — at least for a time. His leisure time in his rocking chair, listening to his precious music sustained reflection, remembrance, speculation — frequently including a wryly smiling Caitriona somewhere nearby, whose presence was a balm for dreamers like him, the Kazakh folk song The Butterfly Lover a suitable *Liebeslied* for her. Her possible potential disgust with him never a reality he need confront. While AE was off penning more precious spiels. Though he seemed winded for a time.

In the meantime the classical canon beckoned.

LOVE AMONG THE FACTOIDS

The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood's futuristic dystopia, is imbued with the author's trademark bemusement, unrelenting imagination, a perfunctory manner in detailing the nightmare (which tends to weaken the Handmaid's lament), and a derisive rendering of conservative manner and mores to invoke both disgust and ridicule. The prospect of wide-spread sterility due to endemic pollution and scientific hubris is the tale's jeremiad, which Ms. Atwood introduces with numbing ease. Sperm is largely sterile and fertile wombs are dwindling. The dual-prospect of infertility and surrogacy are the novel's importunate givens.

The resort to surrogacy here has apparently little to do with the paucity of adoptable babies due to the popularity of contraceptives and abortion, or the unprecedented freedom of women generally not to have to bear historic inconvenience — which childbearing is and has been — a measure of increasing not diminishing female freedom, as sanctioned by many feminists themselves! That infertility may be a pending human catastrophe, due to food additives and pollution, not longstanding Western flab, sloth and inactivity that degrades more the sperm and eggs, begs the question. In general, 'third world' fertility remains high in the book and a problem for its fragile economies. Oddly, the rest of the world seems to be going about its business as usual. Only the United States suffers from the dual paroxysms of xenophobia and dysgenesis, plus an antic 'fundamentalist' craze that overwhelms the government and manhandles the entire country. America, a land of historic contamination, swarm and despotism. A few dissident sects still stand in the way and constitute the paramount 'enemy' (Marxism is a non-player in the book), as if the lauders of say Jerry Falwell were locked in mortal combat with the devotees of Billy Graham. What feral, internecine strife the Lawrence Welk entourage must have contended with. Imagine sweetheart Ernest Angely with a Stinger Missile. It is interesting to note that Pat Robertson, the one fundamentalist who actually attempted to become President of the United States, 'didn't have a prayer' — a quote from William F. Buckley Jr., a preeminent American conservative.

Equally amazing, and often puzzling, is the fondness for spectacle that imbues the predilections of the Gileadan rulers, Ms. Atwood's fervent potentates. Why, for instance, when the word 'sterile' is banned by government decree, do handmaids, the hush-hush remedy, wear a conspicuous bright blood-red gown, with an ornate catholic headpiece, which sensuously draws attention to themselves and the pervasiveness of

sterility itself — and hence their society's grave predicament? Presumably, the leaders of the Gilead community are mere novices at authoritarianism — vide the flamboyant manner the security organs function, driving about in vans distinctly marked with a large winged eye painted on the side, providing a bravado target for rebel subversives — who indeed exist in the novel. Talk about swagger smug! The historic example of anonymity, invisibility and surprise that limned state security apparatuses from the Gestapo (the 'night callers') to the Cheka and Stasi, world masters at pervasive control, has not impressed the Gileadans. Even Japanese tourists get to camera-frame the remains of capital deviants, hanging so pathetically on meat hooks, suggesting that the once entrepreneurial right, facing economic hardship, perhaps feels American blood is a sellout show for the affluent Japanese tourist. Or that horror spectacles are in, and it's better not to try to antagonize the connoisseurs. Imagine a grim Cheka punishment cell, a primitive Cheka cell in Gorky Park say, as well attended as the Bolshoi, and as colourful, and you have some idea of Miss Atwood's love of dramatic rebuke. So much for the 'grey', 'characterless', fascist landscape. Colours and ornate screens abound — even the doctor's office, usually as stark as modern service dispensaries become, has boldly decorated facades on its dividers. The dour, financially-strapped, food-rationed fundamentalist Gilead leadership, promotes a pervasive civic pageantry that would surely be the envy of any national theatre.

But the paradoxical nature of Gilead society is barely touched by the dramatic flourishes. What is truly astonishing is how much its long-suffering conservative fundamentalists have assimilated left-liberal values! The trauma over not having a perfect baby, for instance. A community that once stoically accepted God's will in the matter of endowment, now is seized with a dedicated abortionist's loathing for 'defective', 'unloved' offspring. A community that once interpreted the visiting of disease or deformity a divine intervention to be stoically borne, especially if aggravated by sexual license, now places an onus on the children themselves, and punishes (ranks) them accordingly — the 'unbabies' — even resorting to toilet cleaner to terminate a hateful heir. The ardent right-to-lifer transformed into an ogre fetching toilet cleaner for foeticide! How diligently the Gilead folk have accepted the growing terror of a tainted, impure world — once considered a devilishly deceptive of-the-flesh concoction anyway. Correction — a tainted, impure United States. The Japanese and Canadians, at least, still drink the water, apparently. Presumably some Free Trade Deals were abandoned in time.

The Gilead leaders are in fact relentlessly quirky. The universities, for instance, are closed — during wartime! A time when even Hitler and Stalin gave out numerous dispensations to keep their scientists busy — doing research and training recruits and cadres. Indeed, the spur that all wars have given to knowledge generally is arrested in Gilead. Even writing, except at the highest echelons, is banned. One way of keeping stolid bookkeepers underemployed — in wartime!

The sense of thrift and practicality that usually attends a fundamentalist is also strangely lacking. The private gardens of wealthy and poor in both Europe and North America grew many vegetables in wartime, but not in food-rationed Gilead. The gardens there exude mainly the profane lusty smells of decaying flowers, maybe not as decadent as a languid Fellini suburb — but flowers there are in abundance. Why? To compliment the obsession against lust? In a concentration-reminiscent environment, where our handmaid can imagine stripping before her guards, this slave to conception, at one remove from a Japanese comfort woman? It gets confusing. Especially when the guards themselves are forced to live celibate lives. Guards! The MP-style heavies doing the dirty work. Celibate ascetics? ‘They have no outlets except themselves, and that’s a Sacrilege.’ (Who’s guarding the guards we never learn.) Talk about running on empty. Or rather — screw the historic example of keeping the dogs of war happy. The vigilant austere vindictive stature Ms. Atwood imagines the fundamentalist capable of assuming is, in its way, nothing short of miraculous.

Indeed, her vision of the day-to-day workings of an ostensibly Fascist regime is mainly preternatural. Fundamentalists, once very able entrepreneurs, can no longer raise even antibiotic-pumped cattle; indeed, Gilead has been visited with the ineptness of the classic Soviet economy (wine is apparently available, though where it comes from — a war is raging in California — is unclear). Otherwise the queues are straight from a butcher-shop lineup at the nadir of the Brezhnev era. Unlike the Soviet lineup, where a church-quiet would be stupefying, no one makes jokes in Gilead lineups, whereas much fine Russian humour birthed itself in such lineups. But in Gilead you can hear a pin drop. Human endurance has reached Mother Teresa singularity.

The working of the Gilead security pass system is similarly astonishing, and the words Ms. Atwood uses to describe it often downright blazé. To imagine a conspicuously marked security van being waved by many check points — no checking of credentials, goods or personnel — when the example of pass systems that actually work formidably well (vide the endless GRU checks it visits on all its officers), is either

ironic or insouciant; and since irony is out of place, the alert reader has little choice. To imagine the average security barrier guard too timid to look inside a van is simply obtuse. Any authoritarian system is rife with suspicion. ‘The Guardians would not want to take the risk of looking inside (the vans), searching, doubting their authority. Whatever they think.’ Ms. Atwood frequently makes light of the elementary totalitarian dictum: Trust no one, and insure that no one must! Hitler’s, Stalin’s, Mao’s, Pol Pot’s guardians in fact realized their authority by ‘looking on’; many took photographs. So whatever are they, the guardians in Gilead, thinking? Truly, Ms. Atwood is as tight-lipped on this subject as a Rumanian Securitate colonel, yet the guardians are a crucial part of her dystopia’s control system, and we are asked to accept it as so. Her heroine would never have escaped but for this narrative fix. Indeed, passes and authorizations are themselves seen as suspect as individuals in *fascist* regimes. Perhaps the ‘celibate thug’ guardian has been under-researched. But then how can one deal with a sensibility that can write, without stint, ‘Nothing changes instantaneously (so much for sudden aberrant rage or fusion energy): in a gradually heating bathtub you’d be boiled to death before you know.’ As you’re being scalded to death you fancy yourself in an odd bubble bath, perhaps. A marinated writer may be so poached, but only a few of us went to creative writing class. Who, but such an alumni for instance, could use the word ‘colony’ in quite the derogatory way Ms. Atwood does. At one time ‘colony’ might rank as a Jewel in the Crown, even Americans were once proud of the Thirteen they had, all of which fared well. But in Gilead, ‘colony’ refers to terminal concentration camps where victim-inmates clean up toxic disaster areas. It is a very sarcastic, ultraliberal use of ‘colony’ visited upon the conservative Gileadans. Resort to such tropism, for example, put Armando Valladares into a Cuban dungeon — a credible concentration camp — for several years. The Gilead colonies, the extension of their power and grandeur — Golgotha the lot. ‘Colony’ would surely be as verboten as ‘sterile’. So much for sly slick preacher savvy and marketing. To imagine such bunglers seizing and running the United States gives one a measure of Ms. Atwood’s assessment of Americans in general.

Time and time again, when she needs a narrative fix, Ms. Atwood simply abandons the complexity of the current situation, the intricacies then barnacled to her plot. When she has to get her ‘freethinker’ Moira (disguised as one of the dominant female figures, an ‘Aunt’) past a possible shakedown, the special handmaid guards, the Angels, don’t, won’t act. Why the Aunts would be so immune from suspicion (or

subversive temptation) we never learn; they certainly are vicious and their future very bleak. Jewish guards in concentration camps never enjoyed such leniency. This trust of the Aunts becomes truly bizarre when one of them ‘implies in everything she says’, that ‘Men are sex machines.’ (Not the celibate guards of course.) ‘You must learn to manipulate them for your own good. Lead them about by the nose; that is a metaphor. (Lest we forget.) It is nature’s way. It’s God’s device. It’s the way things are.’ Siren song as handmaid instruction. The ones hanging on meat hooks are the careless ‘lovers’? Are some Aunts then simply waiting an opportunity — to seize power and end the pro forma manipulation? Who knows.

When the President is shot and Congress machine gunned — the miraculous ever obligingly attends Ms. Atwood’s revolution — we are informed that our heroine is ‘stunned’ — indeed, we are most earnestly assured ‘Everyone was.’ ‘It was hard to believe. The entire government, gone like that. How did they get in, how did it happen?’ Well, folks not a sausage. Not a scrabble token to let us in on one of the most daring, consummate takeovers in history. The drama is decidedly otherworldly here. ‘That was when they (the revolutionaries) suspended the constitution’ — after murdering the entire government; presumably the machine gunners asked first for a show of hands? Eventually newspapers are censored — not right away mind you, supposedly some columnists got an editorial or two onto the streets with pictures of the slaughtered Congress. Some newspapers then close down, roadblocks appear, identity passes are instituted (for the first time?) — and still no explanation. Yet, yet: ‘Everyone approved of that (all the new restrictions), since it was obvious you couldn’t be too careful.’ Everyone approved of that. Everyone — in the United States, one of the most stolidly restive, randy, constitution querulous, open, entitlement-hungry people on earth. And all this information from the heroine who doesn’t watch television, doesn’t read, doesn’t visit a neighbour to ask questions (?) The morass is so thick, what can the observant reader do? Even Ms. Atwood seems to know where the best party is: ‘This was too theatrical to be true, yet there they were (the new militantly devout), sudden apparitions, like Martians.’ Well, we all know about Martians. ‘Ours not to reason why,’ says the vital Moira. Ms. Atwood has taken that injunction to heart. We never truly learn who the ‘Martians’ are. They are simply ‘whoever’. There were simply ‘studies done’ or ‘we have the stats from that time.’ Who the ‘we’ are is never really spelled out. We do learn that Cubans have an enviable daycare system, not of course one of the most penny pinching penal systems devised by man.

Ms. Atwood makes so little effort to really tell how it all works — and if she cannot what's the point? — it's just there, the way many paranoids, subclinical or not, tend to view the world. The book is rife with invidious projections and demure solecisms that form a matrix of Ms. Atwood's misandry and strenuous odium for conservative values.

A few examples:

- = Why are like sects so murderously belligerent to one another? (Radical Baptists blowing up Mormons?) Not a single explanation.
- = A handmaid's face can 'corrupt' strangers but not members of her household, and she muses about puritan austerity in a steamy warm bath. Do the lordly men take the cold showers?
- = A propaganda machine that tells its captive audience it's being attacked (threatened) in many places at once! A fine way to keep the anxiety in check.
- = A doctor who does not consider a face a worthwhile medical symptom. Huh?
- = Pacifist Quakers as 'efficient subversives'.
- = Simply one too many comments like the following, (here concerning the "re-settlement" of the Children of Ham) which the author tosses off with embarrassing regularity: 'National Homeland One is North Dakota. Lord knows what they're supposed to do when they get there. Farm, is the theory.' But how could the closeted, ignorant handmaid make such an ominous comment and inference? And if she can, surely we're entitled to her source.
- = Nuclear power plants (in the plural yet!) not far from the San Andreas fault. The one place even gung ho Nuclear Energy Commissioners would find inappropriate.
- = Medicine and pills, generally, all tarred with the toxic environmental brush.
- = Giving birth to a 'shredder', a deformed baby — a word that a devout abortionist might use. But a staid conservative?
- = In the handmaid indoctrination school, desks that still have love inscriptions carved into them — in the community where sentiment is docked and duty enshrined. Sentimental love inscriptions — in Gilead schools! *Removal* on the way?
- = Routine home birthing as a fundamental preference. Surely if the dangers are so many and threatening, the sophisticated delivery room — separate from a utilitarian case van — would be somewhere in use.
- = The older 'true believers' described as arch 'perverts'.
- = In a time of egregious scarcity toilet paper in abundance, enough to regularly plug toilets. And more precious still, custodial officers who can't find a way to lock

away the toilet paper. ‘They hadn’t figured out a way of locking up the toilet paper.’ Daily parcelling it out a bother then? Indeed, toilet paper appears to be the only commodity that is plentiful in austere Gilead. Citizens of Marxist yoked regimes take note.

= Just having efficient fussy toilets, capable of being menacingly dismantled, in a grim prison-style setting. More ‘bugs’ that ‘didn’t get ironed out’ — which we are repeatedly told, mostly are. Well, there was a shortage of plain utilitarian buckets, perhaps.

= The relentless feminist bias, dressed up as exclusive civility: ‘(A man) will never be subjected to the temptation of feeling you must forgive, a man, as a woman.’ Well, to be fair, Caitlyn Jenner wasn’t around then, ‘her’ new gracious seemly deportment not yet a manifest example.

= Incessant ubiquitous searchlights and not a single alien plane or helicopter. Paranoia incorporated, presumably.

= Giggles and terror sometimes mixed willy nilly. I can’t recall a single instance of someone giggling in Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag or Valladares’ Cuban captivity or Bruno Bettelheim’s detailed Nazi nightmare, realistic settings of pervasive, vintage coercion.

= Then the sudden appearance of a jovial, blithe bunch of whole-earth professors researching the handmaid’s journalistic chronicle, and making coy, anachronistic puns about ‘tale’. Happy days are here again.

America the damned theocracy: false, vicious, witless, perishable. So Endeth the Lesson.”

A SALVATIONAL EXCUSE

The condescension in Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* divines a peerless vulnerability, whiteness being both a timidity and inanity, apparently. The very notion of white fragility suggests non-whites can do pretty much as they choose — in perpetuity. Who’s to stop them? Theft in several U.S. communities warrants only a citation for Blacks today, and policemen generally are loathed by the growing ranks of primal woke idealists. Some of whom trash past jurisprudence with fevered abandon. In Ms. DiAngelo’s example, fragile white folk never really know just how insufferable they’ve been. Apparently.

Well, the fragile culture I inherited was based on Greek philosophy, Roman law,

Christian theology and, modern science. It also included the dower of the Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts; Hastings, Drake, Nelson, Magna Carta; Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Yeats, the Quakers and William Wilberforce's coterie who were in the vanguard to attempt to abolish the slave trade — all part of the legacy of that stiff upper lip that assisted in defeating the Nazis. Little did we know the 'lip' actually belonged to fragile cowering guilt-ridden plaintiffs. Some ideas take a while to mature it seems. Imagine, some folk still believe: the Crusades sustained a Christianity that eventually helped foster the Enlightenment and its renascent Humanism, allowing zealous artists and intellectuals of varying philosophy to proliferate, inculcating a restlessness that helped seed the Industrial Revolution and a mercantilism which saw goods made for common folk while fostering a medical science that eventually produced penicillin and vaccinations for many debilitating and deadly diseases — all the work of timid fragile pansies who harboured a latent hate of themselves and fear of any outsider taking note. Hard to get off that rollercoaster! If the Greeks conceived ethics and human striving as benchmarks in their philosophy, our woke social philosophy is keen to slight both pride and piety, dismissing survival itself as adventitious, excepts for Blacks of course. Two of the presumptions in Ms. DiAngelo's outlook: all non-white cultures, ethnicities are commensurate (today's BLM advocates might disagree); a belief in white fragility is by its very presumption innate and incontestable (discounting a relatively long-standing Western culture that honoured if not sustained freedom and understanding). American philosopher Eric Hoffer said the following: "Most every radical perception begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket."

The white lady, Ms. DiAngelo, doth protest with little or no modesty, let alone fragility. Her seminars now cost a minimum of \$10,000, According to the Daily Caller News Foundation, the last time I looked. Leaders of such seminars can make more in one day than the median Black household makes in months. So at least one 'white' isn't cowering in dismay.

The Parable of the Madman according to Nietzsche is pertinent here I think: The madman came into their midst and dazed them with his indictment fervour. 'Whither is your God?' he cried, 'I will tell you. 'We have willfully killed him — you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? The holiest and proudest of all have bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe the blood off us? What water is there for us

to clean ourselves from the effluent? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this need an imperative for us, mere mortals? Must we not ourselves become vengeful reprovers simply to appear worthy of being? There has never been a greater need, and whoever is born after us, for the sake of this cleansing need, he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.'

White Fragility would seem to be a fine example of the atonement ritual Nietzsche espouses.

THE UNASSAILABLE ANGRY BLACK

Because I grew up — with my weepy other half — in a community without Blacks, and was a Canadian, I knew any comment I might make about Americans or American problems would be slighted if not denigrated by Americans themselves. Canadians are those indecipherable eskimos who live somewhere North of them. Indeed, ignorance of Canada seems to be a badge of honour for Americans. How could an intelligent person ever bother taking note of such nonentities? I realize that assessment may be a bit extreme, but not by much. I played golf with some very agreeable Americans at the North Bellingham Golf Course in Washington for over ten years. Good humour and conviviality reigned, except when the Canadian, me, might comment upon American mores or folkways, or the universal medical plan Canadians enjoyed, a plan my father, a physician, helped sustain for over thirty years. One salient American comment vis-a-vis the Canadian Medical Plan: "I can get an MRI this afternoon; how long does it take you to get one?" Answer: "Usually within a fortnight, except in an emergency — *all* Canadians being so *handicapped*." Thus, seeing the current unrest throughout the United States, some Blacks actually blithely urging the killing of white Americans — many Canadians not immune I presume, nor most Europeans, Scandinavians, Australians and New Zealanders, for that matter — it's difficult to sit back and play Solitaire. So, for better or worse: Are American Blacks really facing a sinister culling, as some enlightened pundits think. A cagey genocide — like the Jews, Armenians and Ukrainians experienced? Ben Crump thinks so. Is Black culture sacrosanct, white culture criminally insidious and unpardonable? Ben Crump thinks so. Is it perverse to point out that American Blacks make more money and live longer than most Blacks in Africa? I can't imagine Trevor Noah, who enjoys a comfortable applauded life skewering American whites, permanently returning to South Africa, his homeland, anytime soon. It's said that Blacks toiled to make

America what it is — a comparative safe and comfortable country to live in — until recently. So why are so many mainly Black nations world wide, long since devoid of perverse consequential whites, not attracting more immigrants? Is the question itself inane, perverse? And if white fragility is so pervasive as Robin DiAngelo assures us, why are Blacks so intimidated by fragile whites, such that some Blacks demand the total elimination of them? Ms. DiAngelo claims whites in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. I assume she declares that with a straight face today. Whites who've recently had their businesses trashed by incendiary mobs, their civic monuments desolated, are simply getting what they deserve, right? Buildings burn, historic monuments fall, clogged streets shut down cities, retail stores get looted and destroyed, dissenters of all stripes, even bystanders, get beaten up. It gets so involuted that slugs like me tend to lose their way. Being as old as I am has its compensations: you won't be that addled that much longer. Many countries where Blacks reign are not places that many American Blacks would want to move to, certainly few whites. Is pointing that out so incendiary? I think there are intellectual and aesthetic nuances here no one has the courage to investigate, let alone tolerate. Except perhaps insufferable dorks like me. For instance: If I prefer listening to Helene Fischer than to say Jassmeia Horn, am I a racist, fragile or not? If I prefer ballet or classic ballroom dancing to the latest variety of hip hop, am I a dyed in the wool pervert? If I side with Cornel West's criticism of Ta-Nehisi Coates' need to erase distinction and reject complexity, a soulful pilgrimage that vilifies most whites — am I a hideous caitiff? If I prefer Camille Paglia's articulate words to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's accusative exhortations, am I a dyed in the wool coward? If I prefer listening to placid Jordan Peterson rather than the fulminating Reverend Al Sharpton am I an insidious bigot? If I prefer the optimism implicit in the studious research of Stephen Pinker, rather than the Sibylline sociological pronouncements of Robin DiAngelo, am I a fearful piker? If I prefer hearing a teenager play tunes from Der Rosenkavalier on an electric violin in the placid historic city centre of Prague, rather than the Bad Brains rock band inciting a raucous audience in modern Detroit, am I simply unsalvageable? If I prefer a staid Catholic service to a blithe one in a Southern Baptist church am I a fulsome deadbeat? Actually, I tend to think both services rather ominous, confession being so awesome, but being a legatee of the former, the taint remains, right? There were very few Blacks in the Canadian university I attended, yet, to the best of my knowledge, the five I knew all did well

there, stayed in Canada and got good jobs, when the presumption was they'd return to their home countries when their education here was complete. I did have a close coloured friend, a Tamil, for over forty years who recently died, who shared with me a love of jazz (mainly the swing era), classical music (he was for a time a soloist in Vancouver's Bach Choir — one of Canada's finest), and spicy food, even the English literature we read at the University of British Columbia in the late Seventies. Did he think me a racist? I never thought to ask. The more fool me, right?

Candid debate, spontaneity, humour, irony, tolerance, trust, appear to be moribund today. Will the Democratic Party change its name I wonder? Confederate politicians were, by and large, all Democrats, the same Democrats who facilitated Jim Crow. Moreover, the founder of the party was a slave holder I understand. Speaking of ardent Democrats, Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said on the Senate floor recently that 'the United States didn't inherit slavery from anybody. We created it.' That's bad. So the slavery still at large in parts of the world is the exclusive fault of the United States! Pointing out that slavery preceded Christianity by many centuries might get you lynched. One might well suspect that the Ugly American has an exclusive copyright on 'Ugliness': spectacular taint for the largest audience possible.

MISS WORLD

That a beauty pageant might serve as a pretext for murderous street riots came as a shock to many Westerners, including me, who generally don't take the pageant that seriously — certainly not *that* seriously. But with Wahabi piety now more or less entrenched, the Taliban fully in power in Afghanistan, girls there no longer welcome in schools beyond grade six, and 'demure' female attire there mandatory as ever — an intrepid look at an early beauty pageant *in* a Muslim community seems in order. Now, among smart liberals today, beauty pageants are more or less 'jejune' — the epithet Woody Allen deployed to sound both precious and insufferable. But the historic riot during the beauty pageant in 2002 in Kaduna, Nigeria left 215 dead, 1300 plus injured, and over 12,000 homeless (Washington Post). A tragedy largely forgotten today. The straw that ignited that conflagration seemed wildly incommensurate — a journalist's remark that Mohammed, *The Mohammad*, a chap who didn't hide the fact he avidly liked women, might find one or two contestants congenial — possibly the former Miss World, Agbani Darego, an exceedingly pretty Nigerian. This unwary

comment served as the pretext for a precipitous and horrific jihad! Which resulted in many dumfounded innocents being summarily dragged from their cars and slaughtered. The writer of the incendiary comment, Isioma Daniel, who worked at the time for This Day, fled the country for her life, facing the edict of an Imam that demanded her assassination! (Do note the vindictive mania of Iranian mullahs today.)

But even then the Western hand wringers, the blame America first votaries, were soon out in force. A long pedigree these vigilantes have. Pronounced one much quoted British feminist, oblivious to all but the contest itself: ‘The contestants who went to London (where the contest was restaged) were wearing swim wear dripping with blood.’ And she didn’t mean bikinis made of sable, the usual target where blood gets shed — when hurled at runway models. No mention of the Nigerian woman, Amina Lawal who, at the time, had been condemned to death by stoning under Sharia law for having an out-of-wedlock baby. No, just the standard irritation with a reporter, Isioma Daniel, who should have known better. The first Miss Nigeria, Grace Atinuke Oyelude, who was crowned in 1957, at least found the incident ‘regrettable’. Miss Turkey, Azra Akin, who won in 2001 and was crowned by the 2000 winner, Agbani Darego, Miss Nigeria — thence the venue for the 2002 contest. As far as I know Ms. Darego has never weighed in on the subject, perhaps in hopes of returning to her homeland one day.

Nigeria was and is a divided country. In the North the Fulani and Hausa peoples, in the South the once numerous Christians and Animists that Boko Haram regularly attacked and well neigh annihilated in some quarters.

Instructive in this regard are the writings of Sayyid Qutb, a keen observer of the modern political jihad, who was hanged in Egypt in 1966, ostensibly for treason. His journey towards radical Islam was sparked in part by his visceral reaction to the materialism and ostensible promiscuity he witnessed in 1950s America. (Imagine if he were alive in America today!) Mr. Qutb concluded that the decadence of the West was attributable to a long tradition of separation of church and state. The result was a cacophony of values, morals and behaviors. In short, pluralism equalled anarchy and chaos for him. As a rampart against materialism and secularism, Mr. Qutb advocated Islamic purity. Islam, he argued, is the total, self-contained package, which should govern all aspects of life from affairs of state to social problems. Therefore, Islam cannot compromise or co-exist with secularism. While the West reveres, or revered, freedom, Islam reveres virtue, Mr. Qutb said. Democracy is heretical because it holds

that sovereignty flows from the people and not the Almighty. ‘Human’ rights are inconsequential he claims, because atheist/agnostic humans are often insatiably greedy; what’s important is following the immutable rules.’ Mr. Qutb advocated purging Islam of all Western influences and incited all true Muslims to stand up for their religion against the West and its agents. Since his death, many of his disciples have been busy implementing his utopia through violence, although Mr. Qutb himself stopped short of endorsing it in his writings. Regardless, his philosophy reveals a recipe for protracted war, internecine and global. It has inspired the Taliban and ISIS-styled terrorists, the separatists in Pakistan and other parts of Asia who want to establish Islamic states or Caliphates. The ugliness that ruined the beauty pageant in Nigeria is but a footnote compared to the coming struggle for the heart and soul of mainstream Islam.

Sadly, Western democracy no longer enshrines tolerance. The West’s New Social Justice Warriors — the Special Forces of the Politically Correct — strive for essentially intolerance of all past tolerance, for such tolerance means free speech which is now considered very risky if not a vehicle for ethnocentrism and racism. Indeed, the West’s, particularly American’s straight-jacket obsession with race and sexual proclivities, is a compulsive metamorphosis that’s becoming a main highway, a new fanaticism analogous to Islamic intolerance.

If democracy eclipsed Nazism and Communism, the countries of the Middle East were not impressed, apparently. Of the states there, how many are even token democracies? And what contemporary achievements other than capital aggrandizement for the few can they really boast? Why is Israel, the one functional democracy there, singled out for exclusive blame by so many Western progressives? What is the land mass of the Middle East compared to Israel, the population compared to Israel? Why is the wealth in the Middle East lavished on so few — who will supply ready money for terrorists and their families, but only paltry allotments to say Palestinian civilian projects? The cost of but one or two of the numerous palaces in Saudi Arabia alone would have provided many if not most Palestinians a start to a good life. But no, the Palestinians are generally neglected by their caring Moslem brothers — who, when push comes to shove, apparently don’t want anything to do with them. The PLO were kicked out of Lebanon (by the then formidable Syrians) and from Jordan by the moderate King Hussein. The PLO backed every loser in the Middle East since Nasser. So it seems. And turned down a peace offer brokered by

Bill Clinton that surprised many of its own adherents. The ‘reasons why’ are still abstruse for me.

So the progressive peculiarities abound. Swim wear on fetching females no longer being a wholly prized exhibit. Perhaps Yasser Arafat could be crowned Miss World posthumously, to show there’s no hard feeling nor sexual/ethnic discrimination. It might help. The many body guards who had to sleep with him may finally get a bit of memory-obliterating shut eye.

Beauty pageants have a life of their own of course — seemingly immune from their erstwhile critics. Yet the mother of all beauty pageants, the Miss World contest, became a deadly serious affair in 2002. It’s not too often you see murderous mobs rioting in the streets killing its advocates. By hosting the event, the Nigerian government had hoped to advertise its modernity. Instead, the ensuing fiasco became a showcase for a shrill species of misogyny. The wisdom of parading 92 beauty queens around in a country where half the population is Muslim during the holy month of Ramadan was maybe a bit optimistic. But offending Muslim sensibilities is only the half of it. The other half is the relentless march of Islamic fundamentalism worldwide and its disrespect for diversity — for the folkways and mores of other cultures. Vide Egypt’s late Erdogan’s re-designation of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque. Of the Muslims who have fully integrated in the West, syndicated columnist Fareed Zakari for instance, said recently on his own program GPS (the Global Public Square) that he no longer attends a mosque. He didn’t say if he’d be on the barricades protesting an imminent Caliphate-Sharia takeover of part of America. Are the adherents to the ‘Religion of Peace’ likely to resist such a prospect, were the possibility of their own basic faith becoming triumphant manifest? Evidence of this likelihood was not just in the beauty pageant riots, but also the fact the reporter whose facile words served as the pretext for the violence had to flee for her life, and was severely criticized for her ‘innocent’ words by Western vigilante journalists.

There was a time when ordering such a hit on a writer — and by extension, on the principle of freedom of speech — would have shocked the Western world. But no longer. The experience of the Indian-born British author Salman Rushdie was one of the first writers to encounter faith based invective. His novel, *The Satanic Verses*, stood accused of insulting Islam, and earned the ire of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, such that decades after the Khomeini fatwa, Rushdie is stabbed in New York. A reminder that a virulent new strain of Islam remains loose upon the world. Since Sept.

11, 2001, the West has a clearer appreciation of the menace such fanatics pose, but the West's philosophical underpinnings remain obscured by progressives who find the legacy of Christianity the real unforgivable bête noir — the very creed that would forgive the perpetrators of 9/11 and the acts of the current bloody jihadists. Is that it —Christianity seen as witless, corrupt, weak, insipid, nebbish, spineless, airy-fairy — once the animus and thus ethos of the crusades, colonialism, even the aegis of capitalism. It's interesting to note that if Vienna had fallen in 1682 to the expanding Ottoman Empire, we might all be living in a Muslim caliphate. But we aren't — yet. Vide Andreas Serrano's contemptuous 'Piss Christ' (an ornate crucifix stuck upside down in a gallon of his own urine) — considered a work of art in the West. Imagine if he created today such an installation work using an Islamic Crescent or the Quran itself! You can say what you like about Christianity or Judaism because you're perfectly safe doing it! It's the many dead cartoonists, in Scandinavia and France, who are now judged to have been too assertive, too reckless, too self-important. Their impish adolescent scribbles the provocation for deadly primal terror. Blithe, agile humour is essentially haram for all fanatics. Anybody here know many bawdy or derogatory Islamic jokes? Monty Python's Flying Circus comics skewered most Western shibboleths that I know of. And they fondly entertained a lot of people world wide. Are they now destined to be one more reviled anachronism!

LOVEMONGER

We undoubtedly have hate mongers — intimating that the obverse may be possible — a dyed in the wool love monger, say. So what might a love longer be? Let's try on some likelihoods. A humanist who expects full unarticled opportunity for everyone. After all, inequality is infinite. In short, no community, no ethnic or racial group may be dominant; Affirmative Action obliges it. All people are intrinsically precious. Except perhaps for stolid, generally unvalued, if not loathed, white folk.

So what specifically might a love monger want? To shelter and protect people from pain and humiliation and release creativity. The force of loving arms alone. No 'special forces' needed. Thus the education of flinty experience is frowned on. I quote Oscar Wilde's Lady Bracknell here: 'I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is a delicate, exotic fruit. Touch it and the bloom is gone.' Thus, modern education, you might say, is thoroughly sound, the blooms of ignorance fragrant indeed. Still, the 'mean street' garners a lot of attention! Popular

video entertainment would be a bust without it, because it is unaffectedly, unapologetically, awesomely mean! To imagine that deviance derives from a molested-neglected-waif syndrome is to slight the poignant, romantic vitality of a sub- or counter-culture and defiance in general. Risky behaviour has an élan that keeps stolid stoic tedious maturity at bay. Whereas, the love monger would make all people more or less alike, while remaining enamoured of ‘diversity’. A diversity that tends to shun anything favourable to Western culture. And only incidentally female or male, Black or brown (white is the deathly colour). Nature and naturalness are much esteemed, failure an arbitrary and remedial blight, truth a mean-average if not biased commodity, the Christian God a forlorn myth and measure of hypocrisy, the fetus an impertinent nobody if not planned and ardently desired, and all non-white homo sapiens potential chairpersons or artists, striving in concert to ‘preserve innovation’.

The Love Monger. The preternatural ‘wokist’.

As in America, such persons (I suspect) often occupy editorial positions in Canadian book publishing, Canadian magazines and news-papers. They include many creators of theatre and cinema (most thespians are suave liberals, and virtually all liberals aspiring thespians); they include many of the producers and hosts currently employed by the CBC and a plurality of Canadian writers and poets, many younger university professors and, to the best of my knowledge, the few Canadian comics who manage to avoid controversy. Love mongers tend to see authority and authoritarianism as Siamese twins, and will patronize divisive displays in Indigenous Peoples, Blacks, women, gays, people disaffected with their sex, welfare veterans, street people (though poor white folk generally get short shrift); they idolize serendipity, generally pan loyalty (except among themselves), habit, restraint, and disingenuously denigrate competitiveness and profit making. For instance, the elders of a small aboriginal band in British Columbia stymied for a time the development of a natural gas pipeline and, in doing so, aided by other aboriginal groups in Canada, curtailed all railway service across the country for several months, (both CP and CNN suspended operations), blocked many major highways, and left about 90 freighters in Vancouver waiting to unload goods Canadians needed. And all this retributive censure in the most blessed, accommodating, perhaps least demanding country in the history of the planet! Indeed, the few indigenous elders who initiated the blockade, were they living in the heyday of their culture, would not be alive, given the life expectancy at the time. The fact that several tribal elders actually *wanted* the pipeline because it would create many

jobs for their own tribal members, were drowned out in the omnivorous righteous press coverage. When a native minority can dock a country's energy source for a majority of citizens, who must cope without it, you sense a new overriding etiquette. A love monger propriety? After all, natural gas is not yet superfluous, supererogatory.

For the staunch religious conservative, love mongers display a demure, impervious contempt. Indeed, any incarnation of Maggie Thatcher or Ronald Reagan is a target. They believe in no bail laws, and that crime itself is largely fictitious, and haven't fully assimilated the fact that heavily taxing the wealthy will only run the government for several weeks. They tend to see most Republicans as Heil Hitler fascists, and keenly disapprove of people who endorse the Christian God, the traditional family and belief in a well-founded country. They tend to see borders as illegitimate and national sovereignty as racist, and are wary of freedom of speech and assembly. Restraint is often a bad word. Pray note the advice Planned Parenthood recently extended to persons with HIV in a pamphlet entitled 'Healthy, Happy and Hot'. The pamphlet sanctions people with HIV to not inform a partner if they so choose. 'You have the right to decide if, when, and how to disclose your HIV status.' The pamphlet further warns that telling a prospective partner could result in being assaulted by that partner. Better to carry on, risk infecting that partner, than suffering the embarrassment of a rebuke or worse.

Love mongers tend to denigrate sexual tension and entanglement — the traditional battle of the sexes, and empathize with men who decide they want to be women. Caitlyn Jenner's an icon. They tend to believe they can be objective and unbiased (the acid test of a rank liberal) and possess a special sensitivity to bigotry and hypocrisy. They tend to see most if not all men as potential rapists. White men particularly get scrutinized, their record of being indicted on several campuses for assault unquestioned. Love mongers approve of jokes where no one gets embarrassed (White men again exempted). Indeed, they tend to agree with Freud: There are no jokes! Thus, oppressive humourless atmospheres often pervade their forums and seminars. Pointing out that physical violence against men by men, worldwide, is far more endemic and more unstintingly savage, simply proves their point: that men are somewhat less worthy than most animals, which at least need sympathy and SPCA intervention.

Love mongers also make a big to do about the family while ingenuously working to slight it, looking to the state for durable succour and discretionary income.

Independence removes one from the human tribe. What most love mongers all have in common is an abiding trust in themselves. They've successfully subverted the very idea of independent impartial mastery because mastery leads to hierarchy. Consumer greed and pollution the love monger usually sees as the end result of hierarchy. Patronage of correct minded mandarins like David Suzuki has given hatred of consumption (and hence the West) a cultural dispensation. China and the inheritors of the Soviet Union and their chauvinist hierarchies, have fewer consumer goods per capita, have yet to reign in massive pollution, but have largely escaped love monger ire. As noted, the day's bogeyman is a white male Westerner whose hegemony has screwed up almost everything. Oddly enough, according to smart theories of homo sapiens' hegemony, chance and randomness mainly account for us being here at all. Thus, to counter a love monger presumption, pollution may itself be a natural way to cull our over-sized population — which shows no sign of abating — weed out the undeserving, unhealthy upstarts from those who just may not get lung cancer, heart disease and survive Covid 19. Indeed, as salubrity becomes better defined, pollution becomes more insidious. The general health of Americans is declining. The very tension that makes nature work, love mongers seek to de-enervate, as if pollution, addiction, inured comfort and hedonism that tend to scotch robust health, aren't adroit means for a pressed earth to deal with the growing many-too-many which David Suzuki assures us badly needs culling, even in the West, where birth rates are declining.

Still, the West got in a few good innings, and a lot of people still want to come here, despite the curse of the majority population being largely 'white'. How many immigrants are pouring into Africa? As noted in my essay the Colour Barrier: 'If the Afrikaner had had kinky brown hair, oval eyes, and a light brown skin, might he not have qualified as just another xenophobic tribesman with a hegemony presumption, and would the skirmishing in that country have been little more than the ongoing warring in Black Africa where one group holds a punitive dominance for a time? Would the West have even really noticed?' Can one not even ask the question without inciting love monger wrath?... The hegemony of a hubristic tribe in Africa is rarely rebuked.

It seems the Sermon on the Mount has been literally taken up by agnostics and chic atheists who have become God and appropriated unto themselves the humanistic way of all ways. Many love mongers are convinced the Day of Judgement is neigh and we shall all perish if we do not live sensibly — share and economize and let the fauna

and flora proliferate ‘organically’, even patronize the HIV virus which establishes a chosen identity.

In short, the the Come Kingdom.

IMPROVEMENT

I must confess I’ve never thought much of the common man, long suspected of being unique *only* as a snob, altruistically setting out to rid himself of even this single advantage over his earthly companions. You don’t die out on grounds that might incriminate or shame you — you keep moving in as many directions as possible.

Only when you’re finally exhausted and desperate do you try to cash in your conceit — convert your delusions of grandeur into illusions of commensality (being invited home to sup with a wife). However, these lineups are now impossible — the folk waiting to be fed physically, emotionally, culturally, spiritually, atavistically, et cetera; you tend to collect your headset and split. What’s worse, the unmasked sluggard is today often hissed as an inveterate punster. There really is no path above reproach in a land where fewer and fewer are denied opportunity — where for more and more the only place to go is up; where no one is prevented becoming a drudge to elevate his station in life. Most anyone can work like a swine in a relatively free country, even an idiot. Naturally you may resent a possible comparison. Verily, what bright lass or lad would suffer such confusion or indignity? The Gods may have tried helping those who might help themselves but fewer and fewer seem willing to risk the embarrassment of being so halt or hoodwinked. Only when the rise above the common hutch appears effortless, and what is decisive, indifferently acknowledged — only then is the unmistakable nonchalance of genius apparent, and the way of the unmolested, if they stay out of dark lanes, revealed. Being ‘cool’, or parsimoniously insouciant, is the cult of Neo-predestination — the quintessence of Rap. Observant beings know all about that.

Some time ago Esquire Magazine commissioned several experts, in and out of the social sciences, to write ‘On the Possibility and Desirability of a Permanent Peace’. (Not a watershed work.) Without exception the essays were exceedingly pessimistic for those who might welcome such a state. Yet the desirability of a Permanent Peace does not figure in today’s exaltation of improvement: the question itself is no more an option. The thinking has become so partisan that love mongers have blurred the

distinction between force and violence. The very idea of a just struggle, except perhaps against stolid white men, is now a veritable oxymoron in the love monger lexicon. To the love monger even a patently disgruntled aggressive person may not be adamantly confronted unless the engagement is chastely ‘fair’ — almost assuring egregious cost, loss and embarrassment on all sides, inviting stalemate — insuring that acrimony becomes a growth industry: what person, state, race, ethnicity or nationality doesn’t harbour a festering *idée fixe*, the gadfly bite of at least one galvanizing grievance? We can also add the female sex to the major protagonists of state, race and nationality, because modern women have decided they too are in a state of siege. A recent report from a Canada Commons Health and Welfare subcommittee was entitled, *The War Against Women*. Not from Islam of course, the Religion of Peace, but from essentially white Christian men. A unilateral idiomatic declaration.

Still, the love monger has difficulty assigning blame, because that would require a limit to tolerance and the imposition of a circumscribed morality that discourages ‘creativity’ — the great indexed lyric for all love mongers. When up against efficiency, improvisation becomes the humane excursion. No circumstance is so unyielding, no creature so humble or stolid that some form of empowerment, entitlement, mentoring cannot be invoked (European whites generally excluded). Somewhere ‘a place for us’, away from toil and pother and ineluctable humility: you’re okay, I’m okay. Maybe poor in body, mind and spirit, but as capable as anyone of despising humility. Though humility itself is something of a ghost too.

Is it not surprising the concordance of consensus seems so elusive. The irony is that the more people are solicited to complain — to an extensive media watch — the more things in life can become intolerable, especially tolerance of the one thing that offsets the frenzy — stoicism and temperance — the necessary resistance to change when change itself is not an immediate necessity. Once begun, the entire globe looks inhospitable. All buggerishly moving of course, both the drama and the climactic pity of it all. Catharsis itself seems destined to become an élitist imposition. Those lacking self-satisfaction in an entitlement rich universe, are liable to become Black Holes, the metaphorical density of resentment which can perturb a universe.

Imagine, a guy by the name of William Cowper (1731 to 1800) wrote: *‘Improvement too, the idol of the age, is fed with many a victim.’*

Thus a long pedigree — ‘improvement’.

MIRROR, MIRROR

If you've been following the money trail in the world's secret tax havens in the last few years, you may sometimes wonder what's fuelling the acquisitive dynamic — what measure of cupidity, credulity, hubris, paranoia, cynicism, lust, sophistry, fiendishness et cetera. Some will simply say that if you really have to ask you'll never know, and leave it at that. Still, some of us do wonder. Joseph Conrad in his novel *Nostromo* (the silent 'character' in the novel being a much sought after gold mine) spoke of "the credulity of covetousness" — a pithy phrase that serves as well as any. You want something bad enough you tend to overlook things, even your own sordid behavior. But what really is coveted? The wealth is only a means to an end — so what end? Well, I'd sooner be unhappily rich than unhappily poor, you say. Fair enough. But newly rich folk are likely to do specific things they had only imagined doing before. And such 'doings' do not guarantee satisfaction or peace of mind.

A telling journalistic study (reported in Maclean's Magazine) a few years back was done on the winners of lotteries — the big winners. How had the windfall changed their lives in the happiness department. Well, the folks who pretty well had their act together before the windfall were about the same afterward, according to the happiness quotients used; whereas the folks whose lives were less satisfactory and unsettled before, were in general little better off. Some even worse.

Mind you, we're talking only a few million here — not 'real money,' as it's now designated, the trillions that make up the accumulated debt of the United States, exemplified in the Cato Institute figure of around 23 trillion at the end of the Trump Presidency. So what indeed is the engine driving the momentum — the 'rationale' that would prompt seemingly caring people to repackaging subpar mortgages and loans as triple A investments, or the impulse at street level to beat up another being for a pair of sneakers, say? Has the American Dream been so oversold or, at least, made untenable for so many, the advertising molestation reaching critical mass, such that well being, health and comeliness, appear as chimeras for more and more people, thus italicizing all manifest ill luck?...

A few years back, with the help of some friends, I set about to revisit the question of luck and attractiveness in a fanciful graphic novel called *Eurydice* (the singular creature you descend to Hades —Tartarus — to retrieve). What alerted our curiosity at the time was the mushrooming health industry in North America, in particular the largely unheeded resurgence of 'eugenics', the awesome promise fed by the advances

in genetic engineering, which has come to pace some particular obsessions today — the prospect of exemplary health and comely looks for all — the enticing Eurydice no longer a myth. Given the growing, if not accelerating preoccupation with acceptable appearance and exceptional well-being, it seemed the early editors of *Cosmopolitan* were a discerning lot. My only measure or touchstone of such envied endowment was rather subjective and not a little shopworn — the creatures of Fifth Century Athenian sculpture, such as the Greek relief sculpture of Eurydice (from a Roman copy), which incidentally showed that the modern approval of thinness, at least for women, was uncredited then. Of little help, of course. Especially now that the antecedents of traditional Western culture are generally deemed destructive, sexist and racist. Still, the Greek ideals of ‘Know Thyself’ and ‘Nothing in Excess’ were a long way from the modern mantra which more and more seems to read, ‘Without excess nothing’! Moreover, Greek art was umbered if not tarnished by the Nazi appropriation of it — so we were counselled following the rise of German National Socialism. Yet very early on I thought that such ‘idealized’ art, particularly the sculpture and painting the Nazis commissioned themselves, wasn’t really Greek in intuition, in ‘genius’ or finally in myth-o-poetics. The serenity, the equanimity, the impartiality was gone. So it seemed to me. The Fascist sculptural paragons were in essence demoniac not divine, fanatics, energumen not immortals. The extra wrenching needed to achieve the regnant posturing served as problematic visitations for me — when it came to the question of elegance and serenity. Every sculptural tic and stylized affect you find in the Nazi gallery: a figure analogous to Polyclitus’s museful Hermes gets turned into a transcendent Vandal or Hun, and the sylvan placid Eurydice, a proud, sinewy Valkyrie. The aesthetic sense born of Fascism, it seemed, was in fact a very subversion of the minimalist ideal it pretended to honour. So I thought and still think. Devout gadfly that I am.

Yet what also concerned about the modern infatuation with looks and salubrity were the proliferating products the West was producing to flatter them. People were spending large amounts of their income on purely cosmetic trappings — in North America, if you include implant and plastic surgery, nugatory apparel as well as cosmetics in general, many billions of dollars each year. Products, moreover, that upstage the pollution sewn in fashioning them! The ‘squeaky clean’, costly researched, chemical and preservative laden ‘galvanizing’ image eclipses a lot of manufacturing product — some of the discard mess in our proliferating trash dumps.* It is interesting

to note that in many polluted areas of the globe, people are using additional cleansers to clean away the growing air pollution of hair and skin! Thus indemnifying the ‘cost of salubrity’ which yet seems necessary to the viability of restless, acquisitive, thriftless populations! But to what end? For and by whom? And what’s being overlooked — in the merchandising of beauty and health that essentially must end in molesting folks — instigating a seemingly inherent, endless, craven, even malicious ‘passion play’? An unpoetic passion play I should add.

It does get intimidating. And pervasive. The presumption that no one must feel slighted has taken root. ‘Check your privilege’ is the new mantra for the ‘inordinately’ lucky, those laden with good looks, competence and diligence. If you’re healthy, fortunate, complacent, cis-gendered and well favoured, you’re one of the undeservedly oppressive humans in the PC arena. One of the archly underserving. S. J. Perelman’s phrase — ‘You owe it to yourself to drop dead and rid the world of a roach!’ — may have lost some of its debonair frivolity for some groups of humans.

*A list of some of the dynamic, pervasive scene-changing players: 1) P-phenylenediamine, a coal-tar derived chemical most found in dark hair coloring and lipsticks; has long term effects on many aquatic species. 2) Preservatives BHA and BHT, synthetic antioxidants found in lipsticks and moisturizers. 3) Dioxane, a carcinogenic, endocrine disruptive chemical in many cosmetic ingredients, including polyethylene glycols, sodium laureth sulfate and siloxane during the manufacturing process. 4) Dibutyl phthalate, DBP, (also used to make PVC pipe), added to nail polish and introduced to environment when polish is removed. 5) Triclocan, the antibacterial chemical used in cleansers, hand-sanitizers, deodorant, and laundry detergent. 6) Diethanolamine, DEA, a ph adjuster, is added to almost every cosmetic and personal care product on the market. 7) The microplastic beads used in many cleansers that are too small to be filtered by sewage-treatment plants and cause anomalies in fish, mussels and crabs.

SLEEPY HOLLOW The Headless Romance

The debate over educational ‘standards’ is a flash point for today’s PC parental generation as it contemplates what the prevalent standards have done to its youth, or rather who in that generation should have known better! I do know that when my age group got to university in the early seventies most of our professors were appalled at

what they had to contend with — across the board. The rot had apparently set in some time ago, and we were the result. As I recall, well over a third of my freshman class flunked their year. It was a *different* time of course, with few sympathizers today.

By the mid eighties, standards themselves were coming under scrutiny and professional educators were more and more convinced that all so-called standards were hopelessly misleading — didn't account for a child's natural talents. Thus I may have, through a quirk of time, encountered the last of the mossback pedagogues. But by then I was a John Doe alumnus, my degree dispensed by a stoic university.

By the late Eighties the debate was pretty well over, the professors of the sixties and seventies retired or dead. Testing itself was becoming anachronistic. The CBC's CentrePoint of November 25, 1998, revealed the growing certainty of the new double domes, who maintained that comparative nationalized testing was in essence a nuisance, and a punishment devised by conservative parental ogres — who, apropos Oscar Wilde's pronouncement on relatives, 'Had't the remotest idea how to live nor the slightest idea when to die.' I made some notes at the time of the Centre Point discussions. I've been reluctant to trash them. Said one veteran Edmonton high school teacher who, we were informed, was sincere, friendly, encouraging, and very committed to both his students and his profession. I've quoted him verbatim.

'I disapprove of the whole concept of standardized testing — no connection whatsoever between national testing and improving educational standards.' No connection whatsoever. The imputation being that so-called education standards are, in effect, illusionary, a concept the committed educator usually ignores when his own expertise is questioned. His proficiency and tenure are unimpeachable!

It seems the teacher's one worry was that teachers might unfairly be held accountable for their students preparedness, such students being too variable in background and ability, we were told, to be comparatively measured, due to the pluralistic ethnic and ethos mix of a mosaic population. Hence the accusation of political meddling — the intrusive obsession with numbers and rank. Again, quoting the Edmonton teacher: 'I think what we're engaging in here is a political exercise rather than a pedagogical exercise.'

Next we were told that you can learn to appreciate something without having to acquire many facts or details; that you can 'appreciate' mathematics and literature while not being able to remember much of what you read, or make much sense of the numbers before you. Said another dedicated high school educator when asked about

this: 'I guess a love of literature isn't an instantaneous ah measurable item...we're not dealing with a product that you can measure in 1000th of an inch clearance. Things don't register instantly and become measurable.' (I have the feeling this educator, as a teenager, breezed through shop.) Well, what about a 10th of an inch, and instead of 'instantly', the day after tomorrow, or next week, say? It is fairly well known that youngsters absorb a lot — can pick up the rudiments of a second language in about eight weeks, for instance, given the opportunity. Moreover, there simply is no way one can determine what's been duly acquired except to look in on the student say several years hence. In short, you have to take the 'experts' — who abjure comparative standards, one measure of their expertise — word for it.

As resolute was the attitude of some parents, one of whom, a seer it turned out, exclaimed, 'Who's setting these institutional standards? And who cares! I care about this child which is mine, in this context, in this community, in this country, and I honestly think that first of all the idea of there being a way to evaluate on an international basis is, is so (a pause for the right word) *bankrupt* as an idea to me. I know that globalization is a reality, and I'm going to try to protect my kids for as long as I can from any caste ridden globalization.'

Well, reality or not, that mother of three young children may discover in her life-time how 'bankrupt' Canadian education can become.

What was positively serene was the conviction with which the educational élite on the program then 'intuited' education — as if it were so elusive as to defy identification. A Professor of Education and former chairman of a Board of Education said the following, again quoted verbatim — I kid you not — 'I wish just half the energy could be spent on whata we want out of the schools, and it comes before the testing and the kind of top down technical models imported from General Motors where there's no attempt to, to look at creativity to value ah individuals and their progress, and we have parents saying, lookit, my youngster's attitude toward mathematics is far more important than the mark on a report card.' — As noted, an exact verbal transcript. True, speech is more fluent and less bruising cognitively, yet discrete symbols (words) and syntax reveal the mind. When asked about the benefit of lovingly coming up with wrong or indeterminate answers, the Professor said: 'Well, it can keep you at it. You can be mathematicians like, like I was where I did enjoy it, I did like it. I never was a great mathematician marks wise.' Again an exact transcript, from an educator with a master's degree!

The conviction at the time was ineluctable: ‘Dad, don’t get me wrong, eh, mathematics is mint stuff but don’t spoil it by testing me, okay?’ “Wouldn’t think of it son.”

The debate continues. Yet has the purpose of education ever been that vague? One must learn how to live and how to make a living, and making a living is linked to more than just ‘expressiveness’. You can teach yourself many things if you know some mathematics and can read. And the texts you read are usually created by people who know more than you do. How one learns.

One of the students put it in a nutshell: ‘If we only get to put a few of our notes into a test, why bother making all the rest?’

Well, if all is ever said and partly done, the exiguous fact may be that interest itself is as much a matter of nostalgia (fond experience over time) as innate curiosity, and habit the nub of application, for application requires routine as well as commitment. Being ‘interested in everything’ is as symptomatic of being interested in nothing much at all over time. Everything being largely an unknown.

At the outset of this piece I mentioned a handful of my early professors who were resigned to teaching students they deemed unprepared for their classes — students who, in general, should have known more than they did according to the lingering norm. A few years ago I came across a document — a primary document, a historian would gratifyingly say — that sheds some light on that assessment. A sturdy mathematics text that both my brother and I laboured over in our final high school year: Ontario High School Algebra by J.T. Crawford, Macmillan. Same text, same teacher in our high school, analogous classroom, similarly mannered and committed student body — many intervening variables were thus controlled for. Yet my sainted brother, seven years my senior, was assigned (I could tell by the pen marks he made in the text) more difficult problems than I, and more of them; such marks he made in all texts where problems were assigned. In the course of seven years that same teacher had elected, for whatever pedagogical reason, to make easier demands on his students. For the identical matriculation certificate.

A further development occurred within these seven years: the advent of the ‘recommendation’ system, whereby a student who did well on his fall midterm, Christmas and Easter examinations, was exempted from having to write any final exam, getting the student out of school a fortnight earlier in the spring.

Now a final exam is not indispensable in and of itself, but the preparation for it,

the careful review of an entire year's work, helps log a few facts and ideas that are otherwise likely to fade from memory much sooner. One of my fellow students, who was recommended, had an ambitious parent who wanted a scholarship for her son, attainable only to those who wrote the 'finals'. Well, my friend managed to flunk all but a single final exam. He did eventually matriculate but only after the strenuous intervention of his parent.

The above examples are at least highly suggestive. I shall not soon forget the face of that first English professor I encountered, when seeking an explanation for a mark on an early essay I thought low. It took him but a few seconds, glancing at my words, to suggest that I was exceedingly lucky to receive the mark I did. He then, with placid and excruciating thoroughness, explained why.

I never got over the imputation in his voice and manner that I had somehow let the side down. That I was not pulling my weight, maybe even trying to steal a base. I'm sure I worked harder as a result, though I still wonder some days if many of us should have been at University in the first place — that maybe the crusty mavens back then had a point.

THE BROKE SAMARITAN

In the innumerable social angst forums the central question hovers like an abandoned orphan — where will the remedial money come from? For the daycare, homeless, drug prone, depressed and suicidal, abandoned and shut in, severely handicapped, abused, psychotic, autistic, severely mentally challenged and identity corroded, as well as the growing number of elders needing extended care,...a long and growing 'short' list.

Well, the consensus seems to be more tax surgery on middle-class folk, despite the fact that we have never spent more of the GNP than we do today on health, education and welfare with, it appears, such intermittently disappointing results. The joke about the total federal budget going to education and no one knowing how to read and write begins to lose its preciosity. It is instructive to note that flat taxing the wealthy 2% at say 60% will only run the U.S. government a few weeks. (An assessment in a recent Takimag essay.)

Well, the number of potential taxable dollars otherwise cursorily spent is substantial. In the year 1996, according to a Wikipedia file, North Americans spend about a billion dollars on chewing gum. Also, it is apparent many people have

considerable discretionary income — for hair shampoo and spray, eye shadow, blush, lipstick (botox, collagen and silicon for the truly dedicated), hair dyes and rinses, perfumes, foundation creams, eyebrow edgers and fillers, mascara, false eyelashes, lip oils, cleansing formulas, skin rejuvenation products, near-magic unwanted hair removers, rough skin buffers, chemical facial makeovers, touted hair growing salves — an ad hoc list. How necessary is all this for human sufficiency? I can well imagine that Donald Trump's hairdresser must be one of the most challenged stylists worldwide. What the newly apprized four or five dozen human genders do to look good I haven't a clue. One late Facebook approved expert posits as many as 58 sexes and wants to remove the sex identity from birth certificates. Anyway, somebody's spending the money, in America many billions a year on looking their best and from all reports are determined to do better. Suffice to say that most simple cold cream bar soaps wash body and hair well and inexpensively; all else is vanity, yes — one of the presumptions I've been prey to for years, proving again just how dense some mossbacks can be, right? Anyway, billions — plus a near billion on chewing gum — enough to erect a lot of care centres and schools for slow learners like me. Converting the cheap candy and cosmetic industries into daycare and rehabilitation facilities would benefit a lot of people, and employ many people! So, let's turn our largely redundant and possibly extravagant cosmetic budgets into homes for assaulted spouses, transgender aspirants, the racially, ethnically and sexually abused, neglected orphans, listless addicts, the proliferating homeless, luckless vagrants and ex-cons — fated unfortunates generally, surely that is a start. We speak, remember, of many many dollars a year in North America alone.

Adding to the dismay is the growing recognition that living longer may mean working longer. God forbid! Euthanasia may solve some of the burdens of senescence, and once it attains full legal sanction the social advisement for it that can't be far off, particularly where estate money is in the balance and a lingering codger holding it up — particularly if the the person holding the power of attorney may choose to advise euthanasia. The West already has the burden of harbouring a historically large and aging, unproductive population. Indeed, the white European backgrounded race itself will be more or less extinct in a few generations if its low birth rate continues, babies being such an apparent unwelcome bother for most of these folks. Sadly, this extinction may not be soon enough for the modern woke vigilante.

What is slowly dawning on some academic daredevils is that comprehensive social

democracy may have painted itself into a deficit corner. For the first time in history government patronage of the socially disadvantaged, the exponential growth of which being a conspicuous feature of the social democracies — where life is possibly the least catastrophic in history* — may have come to a halt. The likelihood of paying off the debt the citizens of social democracies have accrued seems iffy, taxes already about as high as will be tolerated by an already impoverished electorate. Vide Greece, Italy, Spain, even England. Some experts think money itself will be a perishable commodity in that the current world debt is simply unsustainable. Do note that the Venezuelan government has for some time been printing truckloads of money to combat inflation, yet could not pay the latest bill from the company printing the money! An early 2021 stat. Currencies like Bitcoin relieved some seismic tension for a time, but that time lapsed, and it offers no guarantee. Therefore the whole apparatus may be tied to an endless wrangle over who is the least deserving — an interminable morality play — that echoes the egalitarian need to progressively confiscate property and income of the presumed lucky. All raptly moving ofcourse. A ‘passion play’ with a growing vigilant audience.

*The late reality of Western comfort, affluence, health, and historic freedom from assault, is meticulously detailed in Stephen Pinker’s book *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. (Don’t argue with me; argue with his numerous meticulous Harvard statisticians.)

WILD CARDS

The modern consensus seems to be that wild creatures should be left happily in the wild, a wild that is apparently shrinking — so unlike the Internet, a wilderness as large, savage, unforgiving, exotic, frightening and wondrous as any that this author is familiar with. The beasts there proud, formidable and ravenous as you’ll find in any jungle, many venting ferocious howls that have sent timid creatures scurrying into hiding — the ones that can find a thicket dense enough to hide behind, though that hinterland too is disappearing. In short, pervasive shrill complaint has become a ready style of address, the creatures there ‘mad as hell’, and determined that anyone not so afflicted might be held responsible. The Crusades, Colonialism and Capitalism are taking a terrible drubbing. Capitalism makes commodities that molest too many creatures, makes them feel inadequate, creates too much garbage, and the Crusades supposedly

allowed Colonialism and thus Capitalism to flourish, though our Social Justice Warriors rarely concede that the Crusaders *weren't* all that successful — the early triumphant Ottoman Empire eventually bestrode Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, North Africa and the Horn of Africa for six centuries. Damascus, Bagdad, Jerusalem, Medina and Mecca, Cairo and Tripoli all lay in its purview. Had Vienna fallen in 1683 to the Turks we could all be living in a Muslim paradise. It was the very inventiveness of the early industrial revolution, particularly its technically superior armaments, that subverted the Islamic hegemony in the end, and spawned men like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who tried to erase all evidence of a backward looking Islam!

Well, we know how successful and limited that effort was. Such that the SJWs have more or less concluded that Capitalism is hugely culpable and that males of European lineage are Capitalism's miscreants — a dwindling minority as it turns out. Though the SJWs aren't altogether content about white male extinction in a few generations — they seek retribution now, as do their BLM siblings! Things like Magna Carta, William Wilberforce and the Salk vaccine be damned, along with the endless medical tinkering that allows for hoards of senescent humans. All daring resolve and predation of any stripe must be invigilated and maybe docked. A blue fox may incite ardent romantic tenderness, but a Donald Trump is a genetic-cultural disaster. Robust striving is no excuse except if you are a Bengal Tiger or Sperm Whale. It is an environmental deference that proud virile white men, a disappearing species, stalked today as they often are, may sometimes envy.

Manliness itself is often derided as an appalling index of ailments, ostensibly: craven xenophobia (bigotry, virulent racism), erotomania (the perpetual sadomasochistic feast) subclinical senility (the ritualistic pedant grub), surrender to surreal engrossment (drugs, rhapsodic mysticism), obsessional conceit (egoistical cruelty) or, more recently and excusably, before the love monger colloquy, tristful obsequious self-incrimination. Even remarkable achievement is no excused, being tarred today with the pitch of privilege and/or luck. The 'value of effort' is itself a shirty imposition. Even plodders — the ones who ostensibly don't know any better — don't get a pass, especially if they're white. The nub of the touted sexual problem is encapsulated in phrases like the 'thrusts of nature', and to what extent they constitute a felony. It is a question with, well, many ramifications!

Parenthetically, the external penis is ineluctably a problem instrument, capable both of spouting off and being fitted with a tea cozy. Most men have rarely fancied

tea cozies though. A considerable misfortune given current feminist stridor for male gentility and domesticity. The life force is simply no justification, except if you are a rare Bird of Paradise or a Tiger Salamander. Will white men enjoy that deference in a few decades when they're almost extinct? Probably not. Generic masculinity is on trial. For instance, a late abortion ruling by Canada's Supreme Court vitiates the worth of any man's feeling about the fetus he's helped to create (he has no say in its inviolability in the womb). The imputation, now the letter of the law, is the nominalization of the Canadian male role in conception; being largely white hasn't helped. He's simply a bystander, lacking entirely the cachet of a Wild Blue Fox. The Sins of the Father — today especially a Western European father — are many. Yet such 'truisms' overlook other precepts, such as: belief in an exclusive victimhood can be a fine excuse for mischief; a proclamation of weakness can serve a clever strategic indictment; blame is a subtle means of displacing failure, and suspicion now doubles as insight with effortless sobriety. Moreover, the newly discontented player may turn out to be insufferable: contiguous depression itself can be eminently tyrannical.

The modern blight is not the historic will to courage, stoicism, economy, a passion for truth and elegance (the paradoxical splendour of parsimony), a dislike of intrigue and factionalism, a distrust of social engineering in general — the essential, tough conservative and once esteemed virtues. The blight is the accommodation to a morally bankrupt humanism that can't even discipline itself, so chronically in thrall is it to an imagined utopia — the right to live unrestrained by any special convention, culture or history. *To live, in effect, in a wild without a wilderness!*

RUINOUSLY BAD SHOW

The archness of some past pronouncements linger. Some need resurrecting from time to time. December 8, 1987, was one of the charter-house moments for the Vancouver Sun. It featured on its editorial page a warning by a cool observer entitled, 'Conservative Decade (the Eighties) Ruinously Bad Show for Western Nations.'

And no picnic either for the busy plutocrats then in Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Bulgaria, Burkino Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde Island, Central African Republic, Chad, Mainland China, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia...et cetera.* It really was a long list if you began at the 'A's. What the author of the above headline may have overlooked, however solemnly, is the steady ongoing slide to the Left of political

aspirants and the many new exacting expectations that go with that shift. In essence, more easement for all citizens, including even the working class. Both Conservatives and Liberals have been gradually shifting so over the decades, often tripping over one another to keep up. Socialists have roundly redefined ‘Left’ with each generation. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper wound up a casualty of his own long standing and apparently outdated convictions. And Harper would have been an oddity to earlier Prime Ministers like Alexander Mackenzie, John A. Macdonald, and Arthur Meighen. Socialism was on the march, the cost and ordeal of living potentially shared.

Put another way: Would the average wage earner today happily see another payed *his* wage for the equivalent of what *he* actually *accomplished* in a week? A mere thought experiment, of course. The candid answer in a lively afterwork pub session might well be something like — ‘God no way!’ — suggesting that effort is still taxing, enjoyable exhilarating jobs far too few, and complaint a universal language. We tend to do the bare minimum in routine and monotonous jobs. Workers in the Fifties and Sixties, say, worked longer hours for *their* modest wage. Indeed, the inflation rate could be as much the mean average of the discrepancy between the asked for payment and the nominal effort expended — as any other single economic yardstick. The modern self-appraisal is by-and-large a patronizing one. Thus inflation could well be a measure of entropy, the onset of apathy and complaint, the rebuke of undue exaction and exertion expected in a workplace. Too many demands, too many hours, too much stolid reliance on exams and testing and comparison — for the majority of humans. The tyranny of the hierarchy, which hasn’t much flattened over time. Ostensibly perpetrated by rapacious males. The Crusades being one tipping point according to the new excoriators. Yet without the Crusades, we would all likely be living as Muslims, not as well off as the Saudis maybe (who claim their good fortune was willed by Allāh Himself) but as content, yes? Males at least, the dark hijab, burqa and niqab rendering women faceless, unexceptional, non-threatening. Vide the Wahabis and their followers intent on establishing an absolute patriarchy, the Taliban in Afghanistan being a recent example. Well, one does wonder where the impetus for such absolute control derives. Arabia has a turbulent past. See the Legacy of Jihad, edited by Andrew G. Boston, or The Middle East by Bernard Lewis. The point here is that the early Crusaders did not seek utilitarian compensation, and neither did their Muslim opponents. Exacting devotional effort was their salvation — one of the telling comparisons with our day’s inadvertent ‘slide’ into leisured escapism, drugs and

ubiquitous video ‘streaming’. Especially worrisome today are the fussy physiques of many of North American children: too many overweight, taking in too many non-nutritive calories, toying with addictive drugs, indulging in languid dilatory distractions (vide the leisure to video glean), eschewing robust physical activity and becoming prone to things like diabetes and emphysema. It’s not rocket science to presume that physical ease for a growing number of human beings (one measure of progress) might be deleterious over time. So disposed, the value of effort itself can assume a Wagnerian (Fascist) leitmotiv. And Fascism is our day’s bête noir for the new progressives — its intolerance inimical to their own.

Hence another round of immigration empathically drawn from non-Western players who take up the many jobs dwindling home grown Westerners tend to shun — in the service and foundry industries, senior care nursing and agriculture harvesting. The many carrier jobs in the Canadian Post Office that often go begging, another measure of the new self-regard. The ruinously bad show from another perspective.

*Oxford Encyclopedia of World History 1998.

ORBED GENT

There were times when the late Rush Limbaugh seemed for me that exceptionally rare animal, a conservative ‘mooner’ — a fulsome critic of many liberal excesses that enjoy an immunity in today’s largely politically correct arena. Whereas, gamey progressives, the real career ‘mooners’ (the ones crapping all over stodgy traditional behaviour), do not appreciate interlopers. It is decidedly gauche to moon or upstage a progressive liberal, especially a stagey liberal. It’s Shylock offering you a pound of flesh you hadn’t banked on. Or the suggestion at potlatch time that the fillets aren’t fresh.

Because the stage has been a liberal redoubt, early traditional players like the Good Samaritan set a norm. Theatrically He may be genial but never broke and certainly not impudent. After all, conservative laden farce is a contradiction in terms. Satire of Satire is hard at the best of times and hopeless with amateurs. You can make a monster ass of nerve and rank success — The ‘Donald’ say — but you can hardly expect the monster to take it lying down. Hubris may be bad, but mooning like sex, is part of the interminable feast, to which conservatives rarely get invited. Thus, to see Limbaugh initially grimacing with possible cause at the (former) Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders the Good, fulminating over the lack of impregnable condoms, non-

lethal bullets and safer guns, is the kind of solicitude not described in *Catcher in the Rye*. As socialists are custodians of improvement, it's in poor taste to try to upstage a left-footer. The conservative cutup is simply not in the script! It's Shakespeare's gamy Falstaff upbraiding royal 'cousin' Hal and living to tell about it; it's Malvolio sporting a new tailor and scenarist; it's Lear taking a rain cape and cutting the allowance to Goneril and Regan; it's Lord Queensberry leaving Oscar Wilde a cheap cigar instead. Not since Leonard Cohen discovered Federico Garcia Lorca has the world of progressive surety tucked in with such resolve. The spectacle of the cheeky conservative is no longer deliciously low. Vide The Donald — the insufferable 'card'. The pushy pundit, let alone an industrial strength windbag, mooning the enlightened lefty, offends a lot of progressive people. It's the gross thing to do. It's the heresy of saying 'up yours' to archly progressive people. It's the humanist's nightmare — the insinuation of hierarchy. It's given chutzpah a new singular notoriety in Politically Correct arenas. One might even be tempted to characterize it as the 'ample bum's rush'! After all, mooning, by and large, is a cheeky performance.

CITIZEN USTINOV Lest we Forget

An acquaintance recently mentioned Peter Ustinov in a nostalgic reverie. I listened in silence for I've always felt a great ambivalence toward the late masterful comic actor, because he was such a ready facile apologist for the Soviet Union. If all actors are liberals, most liberals, in my experience, are superb method actors. Conservatives, by and large, continue to drone, lower and bump into things. Progressive liberal ardor remains virtuosic and often shrill. Peter, I think, was a liberal genius because it rarely showed. As one enthusiastic reviewer of Mr. Ustinov's TV special RUSSIA (pre-perestroika Russia) put it, 'Mr. Ustinov just doesn't examine prejudice, he subverts it.' Herein then, a few unexcelled examples of this friendly slate cleaning. Mr. Ustinov's first map of Russia (on his opening program instalment) was rather small: Russia at the dawn of history. Then, after a commercial — Russia, rather the U.S.S.R. — expanded to eleven time zones. No explanation offered, not even the customary hint of a Ustinov smile. Instead, Mr. Ustinov assured us he would examine the roots of 'anti-Soviet prejudice, which affects our thinking, sometimes without our knowing it.' Lest we forget.

Next, we were told that the Russian public was 'skeptical of the peace of mind

brought by nuclear weapons'. That the Soviets then had a huge and growing nuclear arsenal reminds one that the skeptics don't always win out. Then Mr. Ustinov presented us with an embalmed prehistoric cadaver that had been preserved in the tundra permafrost — in the 'vast empty space of Siberia.' 'Not so empty after all,' he assured us. He then sadly remarked on the amazing lifelike quality of this human from the hoary past. 'A mouth about to speak...eyes easily disturbed.' I believe it was journalists Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova in their book, *Yuri Andropov, A Secret Passage into the Kremlin*, who first described, for me, the many bodies of recent, very 'historic' but nameless persons (prisoners) randomly frozen in the same arctic permafrost, their bodies sheared off by bulldozers worked by indentured labourers clearing the trench for the trans-Siberian pipeline — undoubtedly each corpse with 'a mouth about to speak.' Please recall Mr. Ustinov's advice to Morley Safer on Sixty Minutes, 'Their experiment (the Soviets) is not yet complete.' So be patient.

Next: Orthodox religion was examined with fine condescension against a moving performance of a soloist in a majestic Orthodox church, over voiced by the impartial Mr. Ustinov, who told us in a matter-of-fact whisper that a closed or open church is of minor importance (for whom he didn't say), that what was important was 'the quality of the expression.' Not something you should entrust to a mere believer.

Then Mr. Ustinov proceeded through anecdote to burlesque the Russian conversion to Christianity — the Constantinople bishops were the least offensive, he tells us. The least. Next, he broached the question of political freedom and indoctrination, suggesting how absurd the notion of mind control in Russia — this observation not in a university or public lecture hall, but a sports arena! Do these people look inhibited, he asked? A hockey arena crowd a measure of political, philosophic dissent. Such trust, in one so loyal to burlesque. I couldn't help wondering if the Moscow hippodrome then housed the pundits instead of bookies. Many people have commented — both émigrés and visitors — on the cowed (the comparatively subdued) nature of Russian Soviet-era sports' audiences.

Then more up-to-date Russian history, much of it 'peevish' in disposition, a tiny bit marked by 'consultation'. Yet throughout, Mr. Ustinov assured us the hardy Russian spirit has prevailed, a toughness he deemed necessary for both Russian masculinity and femininity, which (so help me) he said made Russians endure food lineups and chronic inconvenience! I dare say the average Novgorod housewife may not have considered her femininity that sacrosanct.

While the post-card perfect travelogue images played on.

Peter Ustinov was, in his heyday, a life-time devotee of the antic posturing many people found entertaining: fondly blazé, saintly bathetic, dryly and coyly derisive, ever so faintly excusing the soiled and bedevilled plodder. How readily he took to children, his own kind he said, whom he took ‘seriously’, and usually appeared at his best playing a thoughtful young imbecile. There were and likely still are a lot of mouths ‘about to speak’ in the Siberian permafrost. To overlook — even upstage! — that suffering was, until very recently, to move onto the next level of negotiation.

SANA

It was a very, very long time ago that ‘beguiling’ meant the airbrushed Sunbathing Magazines I and my cronies in the fifth grade discovered in our perusal of a moldy dank newsstand run by a Chinese barber who loved tobacco and giving Caucasians uneven hair cuts. Mr. Chew’s barber shop and confectionary was as exciting and challenging for me then as any Mayan tomb for a modern archaeologist. The Sunbathing Magazines revealed a world I’d barely imagined till then, let alone seen, pictured. Only later would I decide that the full figure doing nothing in particular was a thematic tabula rasa; the narrative possibilities were endless. The legs, arms, chests, haunches, everything was nonchalantly there, the total adventitious unedited ensemble, as frank and unassuming as the boy’s shower. What the Italians idiomatically call *interra* — unabbreviated, undiminished, unexpurgated; better yet what the Calabrians refer to as *sana* — implicit salutary totality — their rendering of the original Indian concept, summed up the prerequisites for me. Such that I had no difficulty deciding which goddess to install on my own Olympus, the proof in ageless often rain-marked black and white — long before stain on monochrome achieved archival status. The part that wasn’t there — giving airbrush art an unpromising debut — you really weren’t that interested in at the time. But, with the later slick porno mags, came vivid over-saturated colour, flagrant clinical close-ups, slick artificial lighting, peremptory cropping, to say nothing of the later photoshopped spreads, and one had an awful time deciding. The unposed, unretouched, unedited ensemble had vanished. Even the foldouts looked rather corny, patently show off, the retouching pervasive, the seamless skin always a shade of what I deemed ‘turkey umber’, most breasts huge, exhibiting little individuality; enormous size usually rules out subtle contour. The word travesty took on a new meaning. You never quite ‘got off the

hook', as Peter De Vries once put it. Neither catharsis nor celebration was possible, the two sturdy human preoccupations. The available unposed full figure shots, when there were some, were usually of some pipe fitter just before he took his pants off.

By then, of course, I had decided I might just be a little weird. Weird in a singularly unflattering sense. A discovery that hasn't much ameliorated with time. The Sunbathing Artemises and Athenas had fled. The venal, gussied-up, show off darlings who took their place looked decidedly banal and mercenary. To give my aberrant perception full frame: Marilyn Monroe was in essence an overly glazed cupcake, and the new Orphic wonder by the name of Presley looked a bit ditsy if not moronic, and later, on reading 'Zeusy' Hefner's Playboy Philosophy — and his shameless exploiting of Milton's (Isocrates's?) Aeopagitica (an early critique of censorship) — I considered writing the Runt Book, the history of Modern Man, the new wide-eyed Casanova who forfeited fidelity and a wife, as well as the respect and stature as a past respected household head, he would never recoup. And for what — endless female tongue, which only became more hectoring and abusive. Actress Catherine Mackinnon became a prodigious Mother Courage and was soon telling male smarty pants to go get a life or piss up a hawser in the flies.

Then came the plastic surgeon bell ringers and their silicon re-treads. To imagine all breasts looking more or less alike is just what that numbskull Michelangelo did with his ugly mud pie breasts for his female sculptures, and we've been waiting ever since for a rested Apollo to come back from the Hyperboreans* to say his piece. ('Hyperborean' does not refer to hyper-bores, by the way, please see below.) Michelangelo's cool aloof David continues to stand there alone, looking rather preoccupied if not dismayed. Possibly bemused, splendour now more or less relegated to a vapid bias. And God you fear may be asexual, trans. And that's when you really begin to feel a little gauche. (In the current lexicon: awkward, gawky, graceless, ungainly, maladroit, unsophisticated, uncultured, uncultivated, unrefined, raw, inexperienced and unworldly — the short list.) And you return to those little exclamation marks Cadmus gave the Greeks, the incisive glyphs that evolved into our alphabet. And you try again — one word at a time.

*The Land of the Hyperboreans was the land where Apollo's mother was born and the priests of Apollo descended. It was a luminous, colourful and warm island that was very hard to find, because it lay beyond the point where the North Wind Blows. The people of the island lived in harmony with each other and with nature. They

never ate meat, only the fruits of the trees, and were immune to aging and disease.

FUTURE

It is not always reassuring to remember that a mass idol is often close to the mass, that to appeal to many people you cannot expect them to reach much beyond their navel. This fact poses a dilemma for earnest politicians but for lusty partisans like Lady Gaga or Miley Cyrus, say, it's proof once again that sybarites can do the most versatile things like parallel park (luxuriate in the byways of sex) entirely on their own.

But let's not dwell on the jejune, the self-evident.

The unsung and quite tolerable irony is that gals like Lady G. may not really understand the romantic essence which thrives in a culture of decorum, restraint and commitment — where, to quote a former friend of Leonard Cohen, ‘carrying groceries for Leonard produced a rapture as poignant as anything Leonard did on his knees.’ As touchy old Dick Wagner never got tired of rhapsodizing — you sleep well after a historic snog, better still if it’s a once in a lifetime snog. But then Wagner could call his big obsession the Ring Cycle and not provoke the Social Justice Warriors, who’ve decided that rings are for ill-tempered bull males not free-ranging gazelles. In so many words. Please be warned. Eros and Civilization don’t get on, because civilization usually makes allowances for squares. For instance, in Mr. Cohen’s song *The Future*, St. Paul is an accessory with the Berlin Wall, Hiroshima, anal sex, crack, Mao and Stalin. The anal sex is presumably non-consenting. Though, as he purrs in a later number with the facility of a breathless pander: ‘If it’s a thrill you’re looking for / Well, honey, I’m flexible. Oh, yeah.’ Even while he’s waiting for the *Miracle* he can be debonair: ‘Let’s do something crazy, something absolutely wrong.’” He and a future DAESH* recruit may have attended the same barbecue, shared the same fire starter. In untrammelled experience we grow, he’s intimated more than once, so let’s go coal walking — endure the trials of sex and drugs and honky-tonks, and slow dancing in the afterglow. Remember, we’re not talking here about the Zen maintenance of looking after an Alzheimer parent, tightening up thirteen pairs of Mite League skates under a winter sky, helping stock Food Bank shelves, or even getting the tanglefoot on in time. Let alone keeping the home fires burning and fending off phone solicitors. Mr. Cohen is only occasionally stern on himself: ‘I pray that a loving memory exists for them too / The precious ones I overthrew/ For an education in the world.’ It is a difficult request: May God or Whoever make me gracious and thoughtful for leaving

home — for an education *in* the world — with rhythm guitar, select wine and pharmacopoeia, and assorted Salomés to cool the odd canicule. The oracular fire of the licensed soul. The word as brand. Partly revealed to us in his sensational *The Future*, which one aficionado described, for his slower readers, as ‘murderously apocalyptic’. Or, in Mr. Cohen’s consular warning: ‘If I’d just nailed the lyrics of *The Future* to a church door in Wittenberg, it would be a heavy, foreboding and sinister document, but it’s married to a hot little dance track.’ The modern invention. Sometimes called ‘making strange’ — humming at the up tempo pillage and rape while votaries rally the aggregate. Well, *The Future* is horror given a seductive beat.

In *Anthem*, Mr. Cohen, even more adventurous, urges us to cherish defects — the cracks, the flaws, that let the light shine in we’re instructed. An injunction he repeats several times. Defects as skeletal, light-giving arabesques. Things like the splendid light-giving clerestories of say Chartres Cathedral don’t count, apparently. Only the flaws disclose the remedial light. Of course, the gamy intervening variable in all this passion ‘play’ is that Leonard Cohen is really a hell of a lot of fun! Gonads that could baste the world. With an unction the late Catherine Mackinnon must have envied. I keep seeing people hip hopping in endless demonstration or welfare lineups, ashamed to lose a beat. Easier to follow than a Schubert concert suite, the sinister ballade with libidinal feet. The future. But then along comes *Closing Time*, *Democracy* and *Dancing to the End of Love*, and you’re back ogling polka dots, musing over America’s putative ‘spiritual thirst’, and wondering if maybe dancing in and of itself is all that sustainable.

About as close to a Miracle as the reedy prophet allows.

*An acronym for the Arabic phrase al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Less bruising for some apologists than stark ISIS or ISIL.

RAT PACK

Looking back at the innovations the modern art world has sanctioned, one realizes that even in a comparative backwater like Vancouver, the zeal was never lacking. An early example.

A Vancouver artist cornered for himself an exclusive and intense notoriety by the announcement that he would publicly squash a rat, christened Sniffy, between two canvas lined cement blocks, the consequence of which would be the creation of a

diptych when the canvas facings were pulled apart. Art for the great unwashed. The lambasting was planned entirely as a public event, even as the artist coyly wondered aloud (on CBC) what the public fuss was all about. We exterminate rats, don't we? he asked. The Yellow Pages were full of ads for exterminators. And Sniffy, we learned, was destined to be live snake food anyway (the rat came from a pet food store) — not, certainly, a sportsmanlike way of feeding the food chain, though sportsmanship may not be the artist's strong suit. The artist had also checked with a lawyer and his proposed spectacle was legal. The impartial weight of the law. A blunt instrument indeed. I remember thinking at the time that the undertaking could be a rather labour-intensive plea for the artist himself, on behalf of all unappreciated and slighted life forms: If you can't or won't kill off the real rats of this earth (in translation: middle-class stinkers who don't appreciate derogatory art) why single out a discrete, willing Pied Piper (in translation: a poor starveling artist launching a project designed to upstage bourgeois vermin who won't liberally support middle-class derision)? It seems we re-define 'rat' with each generation — our day's 'rat pack' being white middle-class meddlers. But the lingering bloomer was the artist's lone serious, wistful comment: the rat, if freed, would not survive, being a farm bred rat, we were told. I recall Basil Fawlty on the subject: "Well he is a rat, isn't he; he's not about to be mugged by a gang of field mice!" To patronize a homeless, destitute rat (coincidentally about to be macerated) is the kind of commiseration that maims with wonder. Yet, as the appointed hour approached, we learned that sensational publicity is not always an artistic coup. The artist pulverizer had his cement blocks stolen from the back of his apartment and was met, in the streets, by a pack of angry, unwavering, free ranging philistines for whom he displayed not the slightest dalliance to learn 'what the fuss was all about.' In short, he turned tail and fled with great dispatch. I daresay a rat rarely moves as quickly. His poignant discovery of a rabid mass, whose humanity was not at that moment impeachable, was one of the indelible spectacles of the new age, and his pique as memorable as all artists who manage to antagonize the many-too-many boring sluggards (not after all a difficult job) and then demurely wonder what the fuss is all about.

THE GOOSE STEPPING MARTINET

A friend's recent interest in the very earnest Noam Chomsky reminded me of one of

civilization's earmarks: humour, particularly self parody — parenthetically *not* one of Chomsky's shticks. In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Cassius's 'lean hungry look' does not sit well with Caesar. He confides to Mark Anthony, 'He (Cassius) thinks too much, such men are dangerous.' As if to rub it in, a soothsayer warns Caesar to beware the Ides of March.* Yet an imperious Caesar dismisses the warning, as well as a similar premonition from his perceptive wife, Calpurnia.

Well, the lean hungry intellects in history haven't always been lean, but they all have had an outlook that suggests you keep the Snickers under wraps. My own intellectual warning list — which includes mavens like Hegel, Rousseau, Marx, Ibsen, Brecht, Bertrand Russell, Sartre, Lillian Hellman, and the often mordant Chomsky — are not celebrated for their sense of humour nor their restraint in tarring their critics alive or dead. They share a formidable intensity. Intellectual jack boots on parade I sometimes think. In better softer leather maybe, yet treading very heavily if not noisily. No kidding or fooling around. At least in public. When I look at the faces of North Korean soldiers goose-stepping in the P'yongyang parades, I sense phalanx after phalanx of utopians on the move, their molars jouncing up and down (some undoubtedly have partials) as their boots collide with pavement reality. As an early teacher said, you have to take yourself seriously to learn to goose step.

But then I recall Soviet soldiers slowly high stepping in soft leather boots near the Lenin Mausoleum and realized that their elevated, slow-mo step-up (so unlike the flinty bumpy Koreans) looked like the act of a ballet enthusiast — the calculated, slightly raised heel on the leg supporting the fluent soaring leg. If you have a quartet of such Baryshnikovs performing about a civic square you've got a ready audience. The effort certainly seemed stupendous — spry lads keeping up the slow rising lifts for an hour or more. It was a revelation the first time I saw it live. A memory that lingers.

Still. The snickers aren't far off. For instance, John Cleese, grimly affected to march as a North Korean soldier — as he did with surprising proficiency in at least one Monty Python skit — which kept his audiences highly entertained. After visiting the Lenin Mausoleum Bob Hope wondered what the custodians did for an encore. He got few laughs, apparently. Humour, particularly parody, takes a bit of getting used to in grave international forums. It reminds you that God too may suffer, as Samuel Beckett thought, from an imperfect sense of humour. Both the Bible and the Quran do keep the jests to a minimum. As do our age's Social Justice Warriors who regularly

fine the Christian bible lamentable. Though, so far, the Quran gets a pass.

An old headline in the New York Times — ‘Goose Population Gains High Level’ — got Ogden Nash thinking about his own special high steppers.

*Besides pollution and erosion
We now must face a goose explosion.
A glut of geese can play the devil
With national life at every level,
Especially in politics,
Where geese and government intermix.
Thus this solemn thought I introduce:
The higher the level, the bigger the goose.*

*The ‘Ides of March’, a potent of doom, refers to the fifteenth day of March, May, July and October, and the thirteenth day of the other months in the ancient Roman calendar.

ALAS POOR YORIK

Ann-Marie MacDonald’s play Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet, which I first saw at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre years ago, recently concluded a run at the Gateway Theatre in Richmond. It is a fine sophomoric romp, full of high-spirited vulgarity that an audience in cahoots with the playwright’s sympathies finds engaging. Ms. MacDonald knows the modern left liberal theatre audience far better than she may know Shakespeare or the dynamic of mayhem itself, which her hero/heroine concedes a penchant for. First the revised Shakespeare.

Her anachronistic verse rarely rises to more than an arbitrary division of modern lingo into a five beat line, in my picky estimation. But then the purpose here is to slur instincts that conspire to create both elevated lyric poetry and the majesty of love and heroism: we are in the world of All’s Well That Ends in Bathos. Indeed, poetry of any kind would be an embarrassment in the mouths of players who tend to resemble some characters in Shakespeare’s rancid rendering of Romeo and Juliet, the bawdy Troilus and Cressida, for whom love is more or less sardonic. We’re on such a level throughout the mocked Shakespearean part of the play. It is curious that Ms. MacDonald overlooks Troilus and Cressida, a particularly distempered Elizabethan drama, which seeds a sly broadside on both romance and heroism.

First off, most effortlessly, we have the spectacle of Romeo and Juliet sullen, incurably bored, callously impatient with one another after ‘making out’ on the wedding night. Such characters would I think find Shakespeare’s magic combination of serenity and poignancy contemptible nonsense. They are about as attractive the two of them as a joint coalition of herpes and chlamydia. To imagine Shakespeare’s fated lovers thoroughly disinterested in one another after a single night together, given the trial of arranging even that single night, is a measure of Ms. MacDonald’s droll contempt, the visceral high of the energetic crap out. We were treated to a scene so abject and insouciant that were Juliet seen spread out naked and Romeo robustly sodomizing her, while reading a comic book say, the effect would have been no less apropos. It is, after all, swinish lovemaking that usually causes people to overlook one another the morning after — a thoroughly modern disenchantment visited upon our culture’s most famous romance, with a totalitarian’s relish.

The ‘lies’ Juliet told — to screen her entrancement with romantic love — Ms. MacDonald sees as evidence of a straining bisexual bombshell. Well, our playwright’s amanuensis, Constance Leadbelly, does say she fancies confusion. And of course so does and an anarchy loving audience. Though with everything being at the level of a pig out the ‘confusion’ is entirely self-serving.

Ms. MacDonald’s Desdemona, a tough virago, fairs little better, though her love life is not apparently as lamentable. Presumably two veteran warriors are sufficiently exhausted afterward to enjoy a renewing sleep. The serene sweet wife of Othello (a model of gentility) is converted to a virile amazon who swiftly capitulates to boredom when her husband begins to tell another of his ‘war yarns’ — a fine device for trashing both the mighty Othello and the exceedingly patient Desdemona. If ever literature anticipated a feasible Hercules, then Othello is tenably him. No one of account in the Shakespeare play, with the exception of Iago, acutely poisoned by jealousy, is ever constrained in acknowledging Othello’s physical and moral courage, nor his astonishing exploits. That Desdemona may find the man she’s married to a phenomenon is hardly extraordinary. Who wouldn’t be — the entire island community is so mesmerized. But then stolid respectful island folk don’t count in Ms. MacDonald’slickerish concoctions. Indeed, Ms. MacDonald’s Amazon Desdemona is, with great histrionic spite turned off when Othello ‘tells another’. Whereas, part of the camaraderie of vintage soldiering and hunting generally is the ‘story telling’, one’s very ranking in the group the obligation to ‘play it again’ without patronizing

embellishment. Part of the ‘right stuff’. Usually only those who weren’t *there* get impatient. But such esprit is out of place in the MacDonald play. Everyone is simply an asinine wanker or ungulate virago. Shakespeare’s sweetest, truest, proudest and bravest. The screwiest part of the play comes when Iago is demoted to a piss bowl cleaner — Iago, for whom the vilest torture would not reveal the source of his hatred, who would rather be torn limb from limb than give into anyone, who bridles at the smallest preference in rank, is ‘impressed’ into serving as a yoke-bearing potty scavenger. How demure, how sweet it is to pee all over male resolve and sangfroid, one must assume. Anyway, Iago is as drenched in female piss as Romeo is in feminist civet. Ms. MacDonald quite royally relieves herself in this play.

As for the character abortion of Constance Leadbelly herself, the play’s lead character, she is a forlorn psychosomatic mess, yet tells her audience in avuncular tones that what’s wrong with life is the LACK of confusion! We’re too rigid, too polarized, she tells us, as if polarization were not itself one product of confusion and chaos. Yet it is her chosen ‘confusion’. Our age, as sheltered yet perhaps as confused as any, should be a haven for the likes of Constance Leadbelly. Only in a safe jaded era could Shakespeare be held up to such scurrility by a professional drama troupe. However, Miss/Ms. Leadbelly is as disheartened finally by confusion as her audience is delighted, her real agenda being: please love everybody everywhere not screw everyone every which way (the audience plainly preferring the screwing). Her quest to find the original Shakespearean author (the original ‘vulgarizer’ we’re told) is as obtuse as her wish to escape the chosen mêlée she finds herself stuck in. At this point the playwright was also obviously exhausted and desperate. To wind up her theoretic morass she resorts to the lowest theoretic conceit of all, a homely pun, a device Shakespeare would have reviled as a denouement finale. And the insensitivity she displays in dredging up poor old Yorik, converting him — one of the touching memorials in Shakespeare — into a yammy grinning know-it-all, is yet one more violation of poor Yorik’s well deserved slumber. The vulgarian author turns out to be Constance herself! ‘You’re It!’ (Yor-ik) says the exhumed bonehead — and she’s ecstatic. Nice work Ann-Marie.

SLUGGARD

If we agree there is no shortcut to maturity and intelligent women want babies (when they do) sired by able as well as likeable individuals, how else does one know who the

reliable chaps are, except through an exacting life that leaves the cads and quislings exposed? — in an ideal world. But in progressive democracies adolescence is often indefinitely prolonged and the word ‘character’, once a measure of integrity, backbone, resolve, is as often as not a campy slur. Being deemed a ‘character’ is usually today a ‘parody’ of character. Still, we invariably if begrudgingly admire survivors, the ones whose testing has been intransigent — and how else does one know who they are? A dated but telling example: If the choice is say between Anatoli Shcharansky (a refusnik who survived many years in grim Soviet detention centres) and Dan Quayle (feminists’ quintessential nebbish male), the answer for many progressive women is, or was, at least succinct. Remarked the late Carrie Fisher (in Time Magazine, in a telling pronouncement): ‘Show me a child with a simple, happy, uncomplicated childhood, and I’ll show you Dan Quayle.’ Herself a privileged liberal who barely waylaid disaster (she claims), she could not stand the presumed inanity of a clement, unexacting upbringing. It produces non-entities of doubtful guts and sense. Forgiveness here (of Quayle) would be, well, unforgivable it seems. Thus, if a lad has privileged parents, a comparatively easy time in school, wants for very little, and suavely ingratiates himself to others, he may be a risky friend or partner.

Still, pointing out that few people exhibit more durable poise or understanding than those who’ve actually, ably, stoically weathered a modern Lager or Gulag — anyone more perceptive, believable, resilient — is to risk being labelled a crank. Perhaps that’s why the moving stories of such individuals, certainly in the case of the Soviet Union, were largely ignored in the West. Yet their stories raise interesting questions about the modern presumption of assault and thus ease and comfort itself.

At a Washington museum exhibit of Male Violence I chanced upon a still-life, stylized photo rendering, of rape — not of a middle-aged motherly type, the woman most poignantly suffering the brunt of the age’s domestic mayhem (see the Chapter ‘Violence and Class’ in *The Better Angels of our Nature* by Stephen Pinker) — but some young bud actress whose fine bones and elegant physique contrasted flagrantly with the ugly varmints attacking her. But is such assault sacrilege in the feminist paradigm of ‘equal opportunity’? Such hapless heavies rarely if ever win an alluring beauty on their own, and splendid natural beauty is usually deemed undeserved, tyrannical, overbearing. Moreover, rape as a simple power trip is conjecture is it not? If power is the sine qua non why bother with sex at all — just beat the victim up. The necessity of sex establishes a telling dependency. Some progressives have latched onto the idea

that logic and rationality are themselves aberrant. For logic might suggest that what women want is *more* domestic mayhem — an unsparing conditioning ground for the actuality of gaining full and genuine independence, vide Carrie Fisher, the reliable defence being yourself! I am woman, I am singularly strong, an esteemed survivor. Two busky gal grunts in a salient cartoon said it all: How can we prove ourselves in combat if they won't protect us from the men? The 'man babies' as they're sometimes called today. As things are going, the aphorism might be reversed: How can men prove themselves if unprotected from media-lauded, supercilious misandric women? The concept of 'Combat' now requires the epithet 'real' (e.g. Real Combat) to signify in the male sports arena.

Western freedom has been one super-max-thriller. People are openly discovering just how unlucky and unprepossessing they are in a world where resplendent graphic looks and lifestyle is widespread. Naturally they're sometimes mad as hornets and impetuously savage appearance, ability and circumstance — the blatant indeces of their servility. Why opportunity may be a bugbear. With it you take away alibi, an essential human need. And lacking an alibi can be itself a kind of dereliction. A meritocracy, for instance, leaves its underclass no excuse whatever. Look to the survivors. What indeed do you say to the molested creature who has no realistic way of satisfying his or her needs, except to appropriate desire, as the Soviets tried and failed on a grand scale — though some would contest that failure. If you disparage moral rectitude, propriety, decorum, stoicism and modesty you can hardly resent a miscreant showing up on your doorstep eager to claim his desserts. In a stolen land, pride of place would be an imperialistic relic.

Well, I must confess I've marvelled at homo sapiens, long suspected of being unique only as a snob, altruistically setting out to rid themselves of even this single advantage over their earthly companions. You don't die out on grounds that might incriminate or shame you — you keep moving in as many directions as possible. Only when you're finally exhausted and desperate do you attempt to ditch your pride — join the endless compensatory lineups. However, such queues are now impossibly long, all the folk waiting to be fed physically, emotionally, spiritually, even atavistically...it is, for all intents and purposes, an interminable 'bread line'; you tend to collect your headset and split. There simply is no path above reproach in a land where fewer and fewer are actually denied opportunity, where no one is prevented becoming a drudge to elevate his station in life. Anyone can work like a swine in a free country, even an idiot. A

dour reality. Verily, what bright lass or lad would suffer such inordinate confusion and indignity.

The gods may have tried helping those who might help themselves, but fewer and fewer seem willing to risk the embarrassment of being so craven. Only when the rise above the common hutch appears effortless and, what is decisive, indifferently acknowledged — only then is the unmistakable nonchalance of genius apparent, the way of the unmolested, if they stay out of dark lanes. Being cool or parsimoniously insouciant, is the cult of Neo-predestination — the quintessence of communions like Rap. Observant beings know all about that. And the creatures of today are very observant ‘raptors’.

In plain song: it is exceedingly easy to love people, according to the modern idiom — give them all they claim to need. The hard part is to get them to put out, to extend themselves — as many handicapped people do and have done over time. Government is the looked-to numinous shepherd, the market or society the heartless unruly goat getter. Only the fascist mentality seems to expect that people actually work at what they may dislike having to do and, moreover, do it well. And the suspicion of being a fascist today, especially among the Democratic élite, is akin to siding with the witless deplorables.

CHANGELING

One ungainly question in public forums is: what to do with ‘it’, the unwanted fetus. Burn it? Use it for research purposes? Some scientists would not cavil over getting their hands on ‘it’ — some say they already have — and may one day welcome the likelihood of getting ‘it’ live — vide the protracted career of abortionist Kermit Gosnell accused, among other infractions, of snipping the spines of live babies — such that embryologists and virologists, say, could have a truly ‘intact’ subject to work with, leaving some animal right’s activists in peace: no more sickly rats, mice or baleful dogs. Recalling Jonathan Swift, a plumb unwanted fetus could also provide a nourishing few mouthfuls for the many children who go hungry.

If it is a readily, nimbly disposable nobody.

It is an unsung irony that women urge abortion-on-demand as a means of controlling their own bodies, when in point of fact they look to a highly trained specialist or potent drug to void unbidden conception. The demand is of course understandable, the anger behind it sometimes focused on the male immunity from the whole process, particularly the insouciant male who not only shuns or snubs the

end product but blithely touts the randy means needed to conceive it. Some men are undoubtedly happy with that arrangement, yet reducing a fetus to non-human status is as tacky for some people as making lust a discretely salutary player.

The fact that most pro-choice advocates do not condone killing a near half-year-old fetus (until recently in New York, I understand) leaves the unprepossessing choice in limbo: the arbitrariness of deciding when it becomes a human begs the question of it ever being an ‘it’ at all. For instance, recent research suggests that a 16 week-old fetus can in fact ‘hear’ music, and may even be mouthing sounds itself, according to the Institut Marques in Barcelona.

Nonetheless: At approximately the twenty-fourth week — the stipulated gestation — now and evermore — a changeling. The fact that fetuses develop at slightly different rates makes the twenty-four week deadline even more arbitrary. Still, parts of fetuses will continue to be burnt in hospital incinerators, while parts of others, even in some cases nearly entire ‘others’ themselves, will be parcelled out or auctioned off, to facilitate new life-sparing and restorative interventions.

The video Planned Parenthood belatedly banned, showed a broker negotiating to sell body parts from ever more mature fetuses — the ones usually providing the most serviceable organs. Critics claim the film was badly edited, but the section where a PP broker is seen negotiating the cost of fetal tissue with a prospective purchaser has not, to my knowledge, been repudiated. Let’s face it, Jonathan Swift may have a point. Think of the proliferating hungry mouths world wide that might be fed! If the ‘thing’ is simply more unwanted but nourishing organic flesh.

ROCK AND RULE

For those of us who grew up on the sturdy classics (Palestrina to Stravinsky, say) the transmutation of rock music into the hundreds of genres identified in Wikipedia amazes to the extent that so much of it sounds rather homogenous — to a sluggard like me. Such designations of Taqwacore and Ethereal Wave are as alien to me as classic Chinese zhongyue. I do realize such an admission is unbecoming in this all-inclusive age, especially now that traditional Western Culture generally is considered monotonous, tiresome, even irksome. How many kids listen to classical symphonic music any more? How many even know such expression still exists?

The other question that haunts is why so many rock musicians lead such hectic lives. I’m sure many operatic divas have moments of pique, and there must be

symphony orchestra bassoon players who wish their scores were less minimal, but most symphonic musicians lead unspectacular lives. Is that maybe not a net benefit given the wonderful music they produce — over a lifetime?

To say that much rock music is loud is banal, given the often strident decibel level. Years ago I sat through one entire concert and was partially deaf for some time after. Parenthetically, even the deaf join in. In Rap, the lyric tune itself is slighted (another class imposition fingered, perhaps), the words there fuse into a guttural glottal or piercing pitch stanchion. The beat has become simply omnivorous and hypnotically obliterating when incessant. In convulsive films — the kind where blithe tumult reigns and beautiful jaybird actors contend with ogres — racy scores accent primal throb while agony, mayhem, lust and pathos surge and percolate. Even ballads and commitment songs stalk now with pressure cooker intensity — the rock canary screwing up her face as if grossly constipated or a victim of piles.

To the extent that a plurality of citizens have decided that life in general sucks, one might say that rock has worked, for if there is any single ingredient that makes both austerity and long-term commitment tedious, it is the suspicion that your gonads are missing out. I realize there's a hierarchy of professional critics out there who parse modern popular music into many genres, and not all bands and singers get glowing reviews. But the disgust with parochial middle class values and tastes seems fixed in amber. You berate a group of folks long enough you cannot stand being around them! Well, that class of folks will likely be extinct in a few generations. None too soon one must presume. The trivialization of convention was of course a given in early rock. And anyone could be a critic. The lead singer of the Eurythmics — an early rock icon — delighted in the fact that everything her group did was, well, unchartable and serendipitous. No boss was going to crate, label and suck her dry — that is how she talked before such rock connoisseurs as the CBC's Paul McGrath. Proof positive of the birth of a new enlightened perception unknown to past mortals. We hadn't really heard or seen anything yet. To sustain that much mannered insurrection over a lifetime you have to live in a relatively comfortable and affluent society. Which we're told today is unearned for many citizens. Hence the warrant to so vociferously sound off.

In most rock music videos today the space is frenetic, the images often so close-cut you only 'glimpse': boredom is measured in the quarter second, apparently, except for the precious shots of the feature performer, often at a low angle to showcase the groin

area, almost a given in some videos.

Another curiosity fronting this cultural ferment is the ‘alert’ commentator giving us the lowdown. To imagine that there exists a human with sufficient prescience to instruct us in the byways of rock — the form of expression that continually reinvents itself with the speed of caprice — one aficionado’s rendition — is a rare gift. The fact that the ‘best’ practitioners of rock tend to dump all over the idea of ‘standards’ is simply part of the self-dramatic high. But then someone must do the select encouraging, otherwise the lead singer of the Eurythmics may come to believe her periodic artistic doubt has some basis in reality. But then what do I know. The ancient injunction, Nothing in Excess, tends now to read Without Excess Nothing. Hence the treasured odium for modesty, decorum and stoicism.

And, speaking of excess, I felt a particular twinge for Mona Mahmudnizhad, the young woman hung in an Iranian prison in 1983 for her Bahá’í Faith, for whom a rock video was dedicated and made. Fun-sounding music to honour martyrdom. To pay homage to stoicism and courage by deploying sounds that penultimately underscore sexy pleasure is today a salient spiritual caricature. Even the CBC will conclude a serious public affairs program with music that invites us to boogie — but boogie to what? Was the foregoing then perhaps a jape?

But, in Mona’s case, to be repeatedly martyred to rapt orgiastic sounds! The Marquis de Sade would be delirious I suspect. Blithe lascivious music suborns the expression of grief, compassion and ascesis. Witness that part of Jesus Christ Superstar when Christ is scourged. The music exhilaratingly takes off — galvanizing energy, the electric guitars et al stirring a fandango of hypnotic thumps and glissandi — what passes for viral celebration in many rock venues. A nice unilingual treat for all. Indeed, such sounds can abet *care-less* binging and intoxication — that doesn’t always lead to felicitous states. Witness, parenthetically, the consternation over the ‘Western’ drug problem, surely one of the age’s self-ordained captivations — a fondly hypnotic culture (all the entitlements from feeling good to being able) infecting all levels of society. And what gets scrutinized — not things like the ubiquitous spendthrift fun but chary élites — parenthetically lack of big empathy and dollars for the proliferating malcontents. When a culture brooks anomie (normlessness: the anarchic endgame of pluralism) its adherents begin to act like automatons — quite naturally possessed. Reason itself can become anathema, ostensibly today a male aberration. The person still diffident finds himself tarred as a fascist — the reliably bad

word in the new love monger lexicon.

The lascivious beat becomes particularly heady when allied with an education moral — as exemplified by the CBC's commercial-spare, hour-and-a-half devotion to the example set by Ugandan singer-composer Philly Lutaaya who died of AIDS. For all the attention to his physical deterioration and dedication (going public before reputedly secretive, proud, frugal Ugandans), his advice was that of the smooth procurer: Don't be ashamed of natural events (casual sex); it's 'alright to have AIDS, (it's) not the end of the world.' AIDS with a human face we were told.

Yet a few sober ironies managed to intrude despite the general liberal gloss. Five of Philly's close friends died of AIDS. His celebrated song 'Alone' was originally given English lyrics, and only when he decided to 'give his life to Uganda' (after his AIDS diagnosis) did he translate the words into a Ugandan tongue the largely unilingual citizens could understand (he was treated in Sweden, and lived much of his life abroad, returning to his home village only briefly, full of newly acquired empathy). On visiting a truck stop in interior Uganda, where many of the villagers had HIV, he was greeted by a choir singing a hymn-like moralistic song which he found, apparently, acutely embarrassing: the poor humble village folk simply didn't know any better we were told.

The documentary ended, parenthetically, in a cabaret, Philly singing his heart out...the place you go to lose yourself, to be caught up in the sexy thrall of a reggae tune.

Has there been a time when affected, infected, individuals made such public spectacles of themselves, in the name of compassion, felicity and understanding — to so serenely excuse raffish behaviour?

LAYDEE

Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, a feminist treatise I read some time ago with stoic perseverance, cast most men as budding Franksteins. If Ms. Wolfe's book casts more aspersions than the Mary Shelly aberration, it is because Mary Shelly's gothic horror is less declamatory. As recriminatory as modern progressivism sometimes becomes, the Wolf tome exhibits a vindictiveness Mary Shelly providentially eschewed.

Before venturing through Ms. Wolf's haunted house where stagey cobwebs daunt every step of the way, I must deal with an underlying woke presentiment, that status is contrived. The fact that hierarchy (stratification) persists despite, and often incidental

to radical activism, is the reality of pervasive inequality. Which creates both drama and humour. Our TV networks would have no viewers if that weren't the case! But Ms. Wolf is on a crusade. Temperance, discretion in the book would be a concession. If Stalin and Mao founded, the remaining trustees of Marxism haven't got over their pique, and an updated Marxism remains a faculty proclivity for many professors at exclusive holding trusts like Yale University (which Ms. Wolf attended) — despite the fact there were no Marxist-imbued societies Ms. Wolf recommended emigrating to — at the time of her writing of *The Beauty Myth*. And there were a lot then in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America.

Another point that needs reiterating here is that the liberal yen for pervasive freedom and stimulation for all — opportunity exempt from having to rely on ability and resolve — has redefined the modern age.

And lastly, rendering male desire as implicitly abusive is, I believe, expedient fulmination. If ardent male striving is at heart a female humiliation then reproduction itself is an undeserved burden and the Manichaeans may have a point. Matter and flesh dwell in the realm of darkness.

So, into the murk, and may the shrieks fall where they may.

First off we learned that women of the 'first world', though far better off than most women worldwide, are still bitter and exhausted and frightened, mainly because looking good is taking too much out of them. Ms. Wolf makes a big stink about what 'good' means, yet would have a difficult time being candid about her own exceedingly good looks, which are as tyrannical in their genetic eminence and marketplace transcendence as any stock-market windfall. Says the demure Ms. Wolf: 'Beauty' is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy it is determined by politics.' I find it hard to imagine the judges at a Miss World Competition using a political bias to inform their evaluations, or that gracile bikini-clad figures themselves are mere speculative commodities. Nowhere does Ms. Wolf suggest Western women adopt the burqa, hijab or niqab, nor does she esteem the women who do.

The evidence Ms. Wolf musters to explain away beauty is very unsporting. She dismisses the tenets of beauty with such nuggets as 'The Maori admire a fat vulva, the Padung a droopy breast.' I must admit I've not noted fat vulvas and droopy breasts in voyeuristic ads in mags, billboards and on TV, at least the few I've scrutinized. So, is a fat vulva incompatible with say long lean arms and legs, a sleek umbilicus, a svelte five to three to five ratio of shoulders to waist and hips, a centrally developed calf muscle,

or an ankle aligned with its tallus? Healthy svelte bodes are not that hard to spot. The Maori in question were not asked or invited to make exhaustive comparisons over time. Ms. Wolf's walleyed footnotes here may otherwise reassure her feminist colleagues, but the research is parochial. How many young men and women world wide cherish droopy breasts? Attractiveness for the majority is not mysterious, which makes the thesis of mythical beauty problematic if not tautological. How many women go to a cosmetic surgeon to demand a fat vulva or droopy breasts? The unwritten terror may be that beauty — where there is sufficient leisure to do the necessary imagining, comparing and self-monitoring — has in fact become body-based rather than style-based. The bulky voluminous fashion once used to conceal much of the body, has long since been abjured as restrictive and uncomfortable, leaving bones and sinew to determine the incontrovertible cast or articulation of a salubrious from, male and female. I recall a line of William Blake's: 'Terror, the human form divine.' (More on this later.)

But then again droopy breasts have shape as well as pendulosity. When, for instance, hemispherical is compared with conical, swell with pancake, tear drop, cascade or ski-jump, is there not a second judgement from the Padong over time? And how do the Maori — to shift the view a bit — rate say the penis described as 'well hung' (an apparent universal) with one that is say equally long but curved? I know one prized Maori-ascribed joke about a poor gent cursed with a penis that could snare a rabbit.

When you get into things like buttocks, the connoisseurs appear undecided, at least in Ms. Wolfe's text. Until Michelangelo's David, in pigmented and/or tribal patterned form, is slighted by Padong males and females, and models in the British Vogue shunned by the same Padong natives (over time), I'll continue to question Ms. Wolf's aesthetic presumptions. Apropos Ms. Wolf's imputation of Bergen-Belsen cadavers seizing the female imagination, few of the models that sell products are inordinately skinny, and none at all resemble the stick cadavers that shocked the world after the war. Anorexia is deemed grossly aberrant by society at large, whereas a healthy musculature can, to some extent, remold a less well-articulated skeleton — a recourse many folk have elected to undertake in their exercise and weight programs.

Indeed, the epitome of female beauty seems to have settled on the 'missing' Michelangelo: a performer like say Tatiana Kosheleva (a Russian volleyball player) whose lithe strength and grace are manifest. Or a spectacular actress like Jessica Biel.

Though a male saying so is suspect of course.

When Ms. Wolfe gets to Charles Darwin, the storm of hypotheses she invokes is finely disorienting. With a scatter gun approach you hit something sooner or later. She deploys higher primates as exemplary models for unimaginative uptight Westerners of promiscuous, unrestrained glee! — ‘sex without noticing’ (Ms. Wolfe instinctively knows what higher primates ‘see’) — when there is no sturdy evidence that humans neglect themselves by *not* aping certain primates. As easily she cites exceptional mythological tales as examples of male subservience, i.e. ‘the clear pattern of an older woman with a beautiful but expendable youth (who’s) only function (was) the service of the divine womb’. An analogy that seems stilted here, for most Western wombs today remain empty, a reality most feminist divines generally approve of, children often being a career drag.

But such goddesses tell us little about the existing standards of beauty. As we’ve noted, part of the rhetorician’s tactic is to take a remarkable exception and let that serve as a playable norm. Here Ms. Wolf uses the Nigerian Wodaabes as prototypes of matriarchs who, along with most everyone in the tribe, can be ‘obsessed with male beauty.’ ‘Wodaabe men spend hours together in elaborate make-up sessions, and compete — provocatively painted and dressed, with swaying hips and seductive expressions — in a beauty contest judged by women.’ All the men worldwide who want to be Wodaabes please raise your hands — an apt thought experiment which I believe has a decidedly weighted answer, even today. All those who think Jamie Fraser, (Sam Heughan) the conventionally handsome masculine hero in the Outlander Series, gauche and wearisome please raise your hands. Aren’t the ideals of lean svelte form, masculine and feminine, now so overlapping as to be axiomatic epitomes? Power lifters, steroid-addicted body builders, and sumo wrestlers attract relatively few votaries. The models I saw on a recent local fashion runway were little different than many healthy men and women you pass in the street. All good athletes and dancers share a basic conspicuous frame, which devolves as much on bone structure and articulation as soft tissue. Such dancers and athletes draw large fawning crowds. Given the progress of gene manipulation and orthopaedic surgery, bones may one day be as pliable as noses and breasts, where even Padong ‘droops’ may be attained. To better warm children’s hands perhaps.

I also find it difficult to imagine that women are more anxious these days about their physical appearance than men, as Ms. Wolf so effortlessly assumes. Many men

seek out numerous compensations for enervation, corpulence, aging, baldness, impotency. To imagine these as any less time-consuming or crimping of an otherwise adept mind or marginal budget, is hard to sustain in theory let alone fact. But Ms. Wolf tells us all how easily and effortlessly men manage, and still hold egregious sway over women who, she asserts, can work twice as hard as men, twice as well and twice as long, and endure much more pain and tedium — and sustain a multiple, independently targetable orgasm (that would put the average grunt in a hospital for a week, I think — her description of which reads like a paragraph from a SALT index). But by now, in her narrative, the fussy vulvas of the Maori are beginning to sweat. Writes the emphatic Ms. Wolf well into her book: ‘The beauty myth is not about women at all. It’s about politics and coercion.’ Oh. So, knowing your vulvas may be supernumerary. ‘The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behaviour not appearance.’ This comment was in italics lest we be a bit diffident or confused. So droopy breasts may not be that crucial, even for the select Padong. That such breasts may keep children’s hands warm and clean, as noted, is an irrelevant dictum.

Despite her umbrage with a meritocracy, which presumably would be gender neutral, ability not looks paramount, Ms. Wolf presumes women are entitled to at least half the ‘good’ jobs — given her hortatory comments about women being smarter and able to work twice as long and hard. In the Wolf purlieus about two-fifths of upper class males merit being underlings if not bag ‘ladies’. How this is going to create a more loving caring environment is not clear. To imagine that all jobs can be decently if not handsomely remunerated (the aegis of entitlement) is to ignore the *raison d'être* of economics — scarcity — the fact that humans come into this world with nothing, not even the wherewithal to survive a short time on their own. That women won’t accept a male-style work uniform with spare or no makeup — which would solve the problem of not having a thing suitable to wear to work (even Ms. Wolf acknowledges this) — begs the question of women’s seriousness in the workplace. Men who don’t dress up for work, as women have an innate desire to do (according to Ms. Wolf), are deemed ‘trolls’: men don’t appreciate ‘the pleasures of physical charm,’ they ‘fail to respond with whimsy, costumes or colour of their own’ — in the workplace! The ‘troll’ place! Here we have freshly dug up the Marcusian corpus of ‘libidinous toil’, one of the headier of the progressive mandates. (See *Eros and Civilization* by Herbert Marcuse, who believed all toil could and should be joyous and fun.) Contrary to what you might think, clothes do not make the man, however much they can unmake the

woman. If the anchorwomen and display professionals Ms. Wolf cites as conspicuous victims of the ‘myth’ were to take a standardized uniform, and get rid of the face creams, eye liners, false eyelashes, and vivid lipstick, the comprehension of the conspicuous woman might lessen a bit.

There is no question that some men behave crudely and badly, in the workplace and beyond. Competitiveness reveals unflattering traits in many people, men and women. If women want a full share of the wide spectrum of jobs men do (a good many of which are tedious, exacting, poorly remunerative andunjolly; vide the derogatory dismissal of ‘burly white men’) at the expense of their male compeers, they can hardly avoid toning down their resentment of men in general. But Ms. Wolf has no interest in canvassing the male experience here.

The paragraphs on somatic idols strikes this reader as surreal. ‘Men are exposed to male fashion models but do not see them as role models.’ And that makes them more or less insufferable, not susceptible to exhibitionism. So Ms. Wolf reads ‘straight’ males. Well, many men do and have always admired surrogates of Michelangelo’s David — in footballers, boxers, actors, the physiques of which many male models emulate. (How many male models resemble Belsen cadavers?) Men devote a lot of unrecoverable time attempting to improve their looks, certainly their hardness and strength. The effort is considerable given the frequent incidental injury. Compare in any given year the bruising, broken bones, lesions, strains, concussions, or the sobering discovery of impotency — the unremarkable happenstance of being a man. Just to imagine that the anxiety of the male over his form and function is any less excruciating than the female is sexist. How would Ms. Wolf know? The espoused ‘enslavement’ of women to cosmetic and diet products is a slur of womankind. Quoting Betty Friedan: ‘Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless yearning, energy-to-get-rid-of-state of being housewives...’ *Really*. How many housewife’s complain about excess energy? A lot complain of being overworked and fatigued. They have to be self-starters which very few humans are. A housewife’s work is only demeaned and undervalued by those who champion careers outside the home. Further, the complaint that women’s magazines are funded by advertisers who sell products to women who don’t need them is the kind of logic that dumfounds. Are women so easily seduced into buying products they don’t need? And if you don’t need them and, moreover, they insult their sense of worth, why in God’s name buy them? If women need the ‘delicious sense of female

solidarity' that such magazines do provide, 'the closet...lust for chat across the barriers of jealousy and resentment' then why is there resentment of advertisers who make the magazines possible? If one can believe that 'the stronger the seductive diet and cosmetic wile, the sicker are the women's consumer and civil rights,' then who is bothering to buy the diet and cosmetic stuff? Again, are women really that gullible? Just asking, dear reader.

Ms. Wolf also views beauty rituals as insidiously religious. I remember a professor of mine who believed religion a concept defined by four characterizations: an optional church, a belief in the supernatural, a specified traditional ritual, and a set of ethical prescriptions. Any one, or even a combination of less than all four, could not then be deemed fully religious. But the professor was not dealing with female agnostics who can interpret beauty rituals as silly pagan worship. Only such a mentality could write: 'As (women) enter on a struggle...into a new Millennium, they are weighted down with a potent belief system which keeps part of their consciousness locked in a way of thinking that the male world abandoned with the Dark Ages.' A back-handed compliment, which, as it turns out, is entirely specious. After all, men are impugned throughout the book as being medieval ogres — *stuck* in the Dark Ages! 'Women participate in recreating a belief system (the Beauty Myth) as powerful as that of any of the medieval churches.' Medieval. As powerful! We won't dwell on the fact that the Christian churches, the Catholic Church in particular, incite much calumny in this day and age — vide the Residential School system in Canada. Islam is of course a sleeper in Ms. Wolf's book. It is the story of Genesis she interprets as man's determination to deny — the daring woman, Eve and her fascinating 'apple'. Do note the plugs of beauty products Ms. Wolf characterizes as 'pure religion carefully organized.' 'It profits women little if they gain the whole world only to fear themselves.' The unscrupulous sale of indulgences.

The chapter on sex is only slightly more bizarre. Even with the Multiple, Independently Targetable Orgasm, twice-as-hard working women still cannot find their true fulfilling sex amidst elaborate gaudy media images. As for not allowing this, men are the curse — not allowing Eve her own body. It gets tortuous. 'Nakedness (has become) inhuman, 'perfected' beyond familiarity, freakishly like a sculpture in plastic, and often degraded and violated.' The men are so addled that rape is touted to be pretty well ubiquitous, 'beautiful' women being especially at risk — which women keenly strive to be? They are actually 'LEARNING...to be interested in it.' I must

admit being at sea here. Ms. Wolf seems to believe that love and Eros are Siamese twins — the adolescent notion that permeates the book, that men and women ‘can reach adult hood with no violence in the garden.’ Well, such tranquil ‘gardens’ are few and far between, and Eros never a stickler for kindness or fidelity. No mention of an entertainment industry that thrives on male-female antagonism!

Ms. Wolf also daunts when she likens women’s breasts with men’s penises because they both ‘stick out’ or ‘hang tough’. Thence, bottomless men (naked below the waist) should be no more startling in public view than topless women. When you can argue like that you can easily make obscenity guidelines look asinine. So what’s she/he trying to hide? As problematic is the proposition that ‘Emotionally unstable relationships, high divorce rates, and a large population cast out into the sexual market-place, are good for business in a consumer economy.’ A chapter earlier Ms. Wolf argued that the best consumer engine *is* the stable household with a mom a budget director mainly at home! To imagine that the emotionally unstable can be regularly and predictably sold to is a stretch. What really can one do to temper the malcontent who can write: ‘Beauty pornography is intent on making modern sex brutal and boring and only as deep as a mirror’s mercury, anti-erotic for both men and women.’ So how then is it sustained if boring and only a molecule deep? A non-selfish, non-self-interested Eros would not be Eros. The Catholic idea of commitment ‘first’ is not fanciful or witless. Surely the point about sex is that it is not overly concerned about ethics or poetics; it is finally reflexive and convulsive, nearly thoughtless — blithe convulsive fun. As Robin Williams once intimated, his eyes flickering like a dazed Benny Hill, when he said, ‘Oh my god...I’m me. I’m human.’

The innate querulousness is revealed in statements like the following: ‘The asymmetry is (that) sexual education maintains men’s power in the myth: they look at women’s bodies, evaluate, move on; their own bodies are not looked at, evaluated, and taken or passed over.’ Why is it chauvinistic to suggest that only a dyed-in-the-wool feminist could write such a screed? But by now Ms. Wolf’s sociological analysis has become rigid as any silicon-hardened breast: you can read of mistreated, historically privileged women in an unprecedented affluent society only so long. Historic affluence, coupled with unparalleled ease and comfort for a large middle class population, confers bewildering choice and, in some cases, facile impertinence. The simple fact is that the freest societies create their own structural underclass; the truism utopians seldom broach — and instead write books like *The Beauty Myth*.

The good news is that for all the *Sturm und Drang* — at the time of writing — only 1.41 women out of a hundred (given Ms. Wolf's statistic of 1.74 million cases of cosmetic surgery in a female population of 123 million) resorted to surgical intervention. That left 98.59 women out of a hundred potentially free to work twice as hard, twice as well and long, and enjoy stupendous multiple-faceted orgasms.

CLIT LIT (For Doughty Daredevils Only)

Its' a subject todays's feminists could stone you for mentioning. Still, I presume the chronicle of female genital mutilation has few lyrical moments. Listening a while back to three Toronto commentators wrestle with the problem of how to appropriately inform the general public that the practice still goes on, somewhere, was like listening to a stolid musician practice a difficult Prelude and Fugue — desperation and disbelief vying with incredulity. You see, to put the matter in context, as we were urged, such traditional mutilation was never, well, a staple of primordial things like Reaganomics. Hence to dwell at length on the unseemliness of a practice that pains and endangers women, whether or not willed by long-standing, earth-loving cultures, is to put cultural humanists everywhere at risk. If you tell the general public that such a practice still goes on, somewhere, the next time a woman of colour or Arabic lineage gets on a bus, some snarky voyeuristic observer might go 'hmm'. And the person so 'hummed' would be the object of, well, a concocted context.

Hence the interminable fugue.

The generic worry of the brokers was, it turned out, very wide ranging, and extended to things like the perceived stubbornness and perceived proliferation of criminal assault by Blacks. A longstanding convention of the studious humanitarian. Blacks cannot be blamed for white perception. All crime is seen racially and ethnocentrically, and is measured mainly by institutional hacks — noted mainly 'out of context'. Thus, to restore the context, put Black crime in perspective, one of the fair-minded commentators inadvertently let slip 'the fact pretty well established over the last fifteen to twenty years that the person likeliest to be hurt is a Black middle aged woman.' An ostensible truism. And as such, definitely a statement for the 'No Comment Department'.

By listening further I just knew I risked becoming an accessory — overhearing the very thing correct-minded editorialists seek to contextualize. But the brokers seemed in earnest. Thus, how do you broach questions of cultural brutality, scarification and

mutilation, without weakening the spirit of humanist magnanimity? People do have sinister imaginations. My perverse Western mind then reeled between images of venerable head binding and contouring (long before President Lyndon Johnson got on the phone or Donald Trump ascended a lectern), to stark images of resplendent Mayan princes drawing bark paper through obsidian holes in their penile glands (so attentively described by Linda Schele and David Freidel in their book *A Forest of Kings*). You don't have to be a hoary European male to blanche before ritual like that. What the Mayans and Aztecs did to their war captives we'll leave for another day. Removing hearts seems at least as reprehensible as mutilating genitals. But then these were the deeds of potentates; life among their hoi polloi largely remains a mystery.

Then I read about Lady Evening Star, a Mayan queen, in a commensurate ritual, having a stingray spine thrust through her tongue, and her own blithe self pulling a rope the thickness of her thumb through the lesion, 'her blood in brilliant contrast to the deep green of her shoulder cape.' (It seems the Mayans also had a Versace.) Another royal, a princess, not a slave to habit, did it with barbs set in the rope!

Now one can only stand in awe of Mayan wisdom. So that's how they kept the backchat, the ululations to a minimum — yet managed to be deferentially even fondly written about later on by a pair of caring scholars! The lesson seems ineluctable.

So gents, off with the penile tea cozies! Bloody but unbowed is not politically perverse if you want to skewer a few snide tongues or an obnoxious prick. When habitual, the resolve to do so can be venerable. Even if you end up being fed piece by piece to the royal jaguars as a war trophy, you may still adorn immortal stelae and demonstrate how the Mayan health plan kept a continent's population youthful and on its toes. All chronic Milquetoasts do take note.

COLOUR BARRIER

A remark by Nelson Mandela at the time of the political deadlock over Iraq in the UN seemed out of character, too peremptory by half. He claimed that the United States President could not work with the UN because it was headed by Kofi Annan, a Black man. In reading some of the notes I've made over the years about the extraordinary Nelson Mandela, I wondered if my surprise was entirely justified. A quest lacking an answer. An apt start is the Charlene Hunter-Galt interview of Nelson Mandela on PBS on the occasion of his release from Victor Verster Prison in 1990.

When asked how he handled his stay in prison, Mr. Mandela asserted that he,

along with fellow ANC cadres like Walter Sisulu and Dennis Goldberg, ‘insisted the authorities (i.e. their warders) stick to the regulations.’ I recall thinking how odd the comment sounded against the perceived background. Regulations? In the early sixties, in an ostensibly brutal, Nazi Fascist regime? Regulations? Yes, regulations. Despite Ms. Hunter-Galt’s repeated invitation to spell out a list of atrocities, Mr. Mandela mentioned only the warders’ sly manipulation of the ‘regulations’ — seeing, for instance, that cells were sometimes ‘coincidentally’ watered down before routine body searches, the clothes, item by item then chucked on the soaked floors. But Mr. Mandela did not despair, in part because of his regard for, and belief in, South African prison regulations — a bit of overlooked historic evidence that tells one something about South African whites, in relation to the treatment of political outcasts in say Amin’s Uganda or Mengistu’s Ethiopia, where appeals to regulations were not uppermost in prisoners’ minds. (Look up the Hunter-Galt interview if my rendering here vexes.)

There were of course sadistic racist Afrikaners and Europeans in Africa who were accused of custodial abuse (as there were sadistic ethnocentric Brits who introduced whole Afrikaans’ populations to the world’s first modern concentration camps during the Boer War); yet in South Africa there also were regulations, in the Sixties, that Blacks the stature of Nelson Mandela knew about in detail, and could over time stoically aver to and win concessions. His stature may have helped in South Africa, but the regulations he invoked existed. Which eluded most accounts of South Africa’s governance.

Comparative realities were largely ignored by the critics of South Africa at the time who saw its sin of apartheid as unparalleled (more about race-and-ethnic discrimination in a moment). The deference shown the victims of apartheid has been at times fastidious. Michael Enright, on the CBC’s historic *As It Happens* was even embarrassed to ask Dennis Goldberg about communist influence in the ANC. Indeed, it was almost an ‘aside’. ‘What about the communist factor? Cause people ask the question.’ (Not because the question had pivotal, topical importance.) With polite condescension Mr. Goldberg replied, ‘Of course,’ then simply stressed the common cause against apartheid while saying nothing about current sympathies within the ANC, which Mr. Enright did not pursue.

As modern evils go, apartheid, the system of white rule in South Africa inspired unrivalled hatred. The late Prime Minister P.W. Botha was compared to Adolf Hitler.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson said that Botha was ‘worse than Hitler’. A sensitive and popular Canadian writer, the rarely avuncular Eric Nicol, put both Mr. Botha and Caligula in Hell, then had Caligula, in a moment of moral pique, tell Botha off. As inventively and persistently cruel as any of the roman Emperors, the willful Caligula was given thumbs up to the intransigent Botha.

The characterizations are grim indeed. Swift vengeful justice has éclat; protracted gritty nuance makes one see red. The demise of apartheid also presaged the very short moral attention span of Western liberals. The internecine warfare in Black Africa got and gets little attention — vide the current, perfunctorily noted, unprecedented rioting by Blacks *in* South Africa. And — at the time of Mandela’s incarceration — barely a nod was given to the destabilizing tactics in North Korea, the incipient resurgence of the Khmer Rouge, and the endemic Arab-Persian infighting (which would blossom into the Iran-Iraq war). The Vietnamese Boat People got momentarily back in the news only when the reputedly callous Maggie Thatcher decided Britain could not accommodate a larger ethnic population. I suspect we never read much about the plight of the Burundis, for instance, because it was easier physically and ideologically to slip into places like South Africa or El Salvador. Western journalists are human, pressed by deadlines, infrequently heroic — not unlike the rest of us. Far easier to cover a story in a relatively safe place that can be couched in strict moralistic terms — as it was in South Africa — where one might safely complaisantly defer to exclusive Black rule. Vide especially its cruel murderous rule in Zimbabwe which the sanctimonious media ignored and ignores.

The argument that American Blacks manage very nicely as mayors, technicians and scholars, ignores the fact that American Blacks have for years been part of a modern Western civilization — both its education, acquisitive culture, upward mobility and utilitarian habit of thought — as James Baldwin has said with such (often bitter) poignancy. Moreover, in South Africa, a Black resembling most American Blacks is usually called ‘coloured’ (of mixed race). He is, more often than not, a BASP — a Brown Anglo-Saxon Protestant. The taunting phrase ‘The white man looks right out of your face!’ speaks poignantly to brown skinned people. The largely ignored Bantu leaders (who resisted apartheid but shunned communism) were long resented by the ANC, and faced a struggle in a government and economy that champions retribution above freedom for all.

The other slighted character of South Africa, and Africa in general, was (and

largely is) the ferocity and routine persistence of tribal violence. Indeed, some anthropologists claim that our ‘violence’, as applied to African folkways, is an ethnocentric aspersion. Still, it is unlikely the older white South African will soon forget the terror Mugabe’s ZANU warriors in (then) Rhodesia, openly assisted by the World Council of Churches, inflicted on supporters of the Ian Smith government — especially the ‘strategic pilgrims’, those targeted moderate Blacks who had portions of their faces cut off. It makes lurid reading, yet the deeds were ritualistically inflicted. Writes Erik V. Kuehnelt-Leddihn: “In 1978 Mrs. Chikombe Madzvidza was forced to roast and then eat parts of her husband’s face. The German Lutheran Emergency Committee collected funds to finance cosmetic operations on these victims of WWC-sponsored terrorism.”

Independent Zimbabwe, once a bread basket to Africa, is now a poor one party, if not one-man government, and deals harshly with its few opponents with spectacular impunity. It is difficult to describe the late ongoing strife between the Shona ZANA majority and the Ndebele ZAPU minority as other than a tribal and, pari passu, racist struggle. The few remaining Zimbabwean whites, once about 370,000, were in 2014 about 14,000 and ‘possibly much less’ (Wikipedia), as they certainly are today. The Afrikaner must have viewed with great vigilance the skirmishing between the Bantus and Indians around Durban, also between Bantu tribes like the Khosas and Zulus. For tribal skirmishing is ageless in Africa — but mention of it is not part of the modern ideologue’s lexicon. Yet the Afrikaner was expected to equanimously and democratically accept his lot and fate in the ongoing mélées, which preceded and now outlive him. That is the way of equality and democracy, the Western moralists say — invariably while enjoying a long-standing system of defendant jurisprudence that is so chaste and refined that even the most barbarous of plaintiffs can anticipate parole.

Thus, while the West was rebuking the mindset of the dour stern Afrikaner, it is instructive to remember that many Blacks were at the time of the Afrikaner’s demise disfranchised elsewhere in Africa. At the end of the eighties, in Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Somalia and Namibia, Blacks had no democratic say in their Black government. The apartheid South African government imperiously moved its Black people around, but it was hardly unique. The Ivory coast kicked out several thousand Beninese in the 1960s, Ghana, about half-a-million ‘aliens’ in 1969. In the Seventies Uganda banished approximately 40,000 Asians (many of whom are

now contributing handsomely to Canada's economy and culture, including a former next door neighbour of mine), and Zambia resettled well over 100,000 'undesirables'. (These and the following figures come from the Oxford Encyclopaedia of World History, and Peter Calvocoressi's book *Independent Africa and the World*.) Ethiopia had relocated over many years hundreds of thousands, and Nigeria over the years has expelled nearly a million, sometimes using tear gas to hurry the departure. If South Africa arbitrarily detained several thousand Blacks without trial, many times that number (in the same time frame) faced imprisonment and 're-education' in Ethiopia, Zaire and Tanzania. Mozambique and Angola today still contend with tribal hegemonies. When you add to the above the frequent use of torture, you have a practiced tradition that must have made the most verkrampste South African policeman a little anxious if not envious.

Yet punctilious Western standards were applied without stint. Canada's Gwynne Dyer referred to Nelson Mandela's 'moral stature' while dismissing former Prime Minister Botha as a 'rat' — at the time when the ANC, Mr. Mandela's organization, was still committed to ferociously eliminating servants and sympathizers of the Pretoria regime — both Black and white. Is the atavistic Black African leader to be forgiven his excesses simply because he did as his kin have done for centuries — according to his history, culture, and tribal mores? While the Afrikaner, precisely because he was 'white', had to abide the rules of democratic, urbane Westerners?

The fact that one's tribal identity is often ingrained, is largely overlooked by Western journalists and commentators who see only colour as the social impediment. If the Afrikaner had been light brown, looked more like a Somali than a Bantu, while retaining a belief in his special uniqueness, his 'apartheid' hegemony, one can wonder if there would have been much fuss at all. He might even be giving speeches at the UN denouncing US imperialism. He would surely be just another tribal member, his 'tribe's' hegemony, sovereignty sacrosanct, and could do pretty much as he wished, much as some Black African élites did and do today.

Similarly, the term Neocolonial is often characterized as a form of parochial coercion. Neocolonialism customarily means dependence on capitalist countries — an unholy state dependent on securing Western aid! The European colonialists undeniably left their colonies in great, and often irresponsible, haste — witness the summary departure of the Belgians from the Belgian Congo (now Zaire). Except for some infrastructure in India, like railroads, European colonials generally neglected

things like communications and the civil service. Yet a resurgent Black militancy, reminiscent of a colonial mindset, took over rule in Africa in ways that are not flattering to Africans. Even the once respected Julius Nyerere, a popular leader in Tanganyika and then Tanzania, remained dependent on extra-African relief. (Most of the newly independent African states were given over to the Marxist promise of industrialization to the detriment of agriculture, one of the early very sad blunders!) And in many cases the rule of the later indigenous rulers proved to be disastrous and at least as bloody. Uganda and the Central African Republic are cases in point.

In his book *Modern Times*, British historian Paul Johnson's account of Idi Amin reads like something horror film maker David Cronenberg might have concocted. And yet, even while much of this horror was suspected if not known, the Organization of African Unity (Nelson Mandela's organization, remember) elected Amin as its president, and all but three chiefs of state attended the summit conference Amin chaired in Kampala. When he arrived at the UN, he was given a standing ovation by the General Assembly, applauded throughout his stay, and given a public dinner in his honour. I dare say the dour and invidious Mr. Botha took note at the time. Mr. Dyer's 'rat'.

The sagas of Jean-Bedel Bokassa in the Central African Republic and Francisco Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea are even more chilling than Amin's, and totally, utterly forgotten today! I doubt any reader of this essay is going to look them up. Black Africa has frequently perplexed European historiographers, for reasons which today's communal ideologues seem bent on revising, or simply ignoring.

But the question lingers: why was South Africa so rebuked — to the exclusion of say the Soviet Union, where ethnic discrimination in its higher echelons was at least as institutionalized as anything advanced in South Africa; to India, where remnants of a caste system still frustrate changes in attitudes as invincibly as any article of South African supremacy; to South and Central America, where a lighter skinned 'white' minority is often as exploitative of its Indian populations as any white farmer in South Africa; to virtually any place in Africa itself where bitter tribal warfare and genocide often proceed hand in glove? Ask a Biafran or an Eritrean. Ask a Burundian, where 20,000 (a conservative estimate) of his population were slaughtered in the mid eighties — a Sharpsville Massacre many many times over! The recent modern era is little better. Again and again we run against the priority of the clan or tribe, usually exacerbated by tribal-totem beliefs. Western industrialists have fomented some of the

mischief, but Africans themselves share much of the blame. How cogent then is the argument that pigment alone was the main blight to harmony in South Africa? Cannot colour be a blind as well as a distinction? If Ethiopia's Haile Mariam Mengistu's tribal folk (instigators of the Red Terror 1977-1988) had been light skinned people, might they also not be cast among the vermin?

Or could it be that the North American TV audience is so jaded it can intuitively smell blood, and those who cater to its viewing whim seek it out wherever it is least injurious to film? Aren't North America's cherished entertainments — licentious and sadistic assault pornography — essential to its 'lovable' rogue, naughty amusements? Isn't Western hypocrisy, as the aphorism says, the tribute vice once paid to virtue? According to the late John Hutchinson, what the non-Black South Africans feared most after Black majority rule was 'a swift shutdown of the international conscience, an easy transition from indignation to bemusement at brutality, to impatience with sluggish constitutional government and due process, to inattention, neglect even of body burning and genocide, and, as always, Western satisfaction with duty partly completed.'

Bishop Desmond Tutu once threatened to remove himself and his family from South Africa if the fratricide continued after Black rule — the murder of Blacks by Blacks, Indians by Blacks, and Blacks by coloureds. He also said that Western leaders were racists, and all those who oppose sanctions were racists — including, presumably, Zulu chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Alan Paton, the author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, neither of whom endorsed sanctions. Though Tutu urged other Black African states to improve their human rights records, he claimed there was no racial discrimination in Black Africa, only human rights violations. One of the grand casuistries, surely, as if the one is somehow more heinous and reprehensible than the other. Also, not exactly true, given the cultural variation and tribal sanctimony of many peoples in Africa.

At the time, many people were asking — again — what was the honourable Western role in Africa, and to what extent should Western governments resolutely see it through?

Of course only a dreamer might readily imagine the clock being turned back to allow the African Black reassume past traditional ways, especially when so many of the present African leaders themselves were educated in pleasant oases like The London School of Economics and live lives as comfortable as any North American. Though in

parts of Africa even today — like the more parched areas of the Sudan and Ethiopia — you cannot go ‘back’ much further without resurrecting a time when few people stalked the land. The history of progress is exceedingly sketchy in parts of Eritrea or Somalia, as it is in many of Africa’s more demanding geographies, even without modern afflictions like AIDS, Covid 19, and global warming.

But the ominous question won’t go away: to what extent is the rest of the world responsible for any single country’s internal skirmishing or natural hardships? For better or worse, the traditional, ‘primitive’ person still in thrall to a largely xenophobic, orthodox, non secular culture, is often patronized and condescended to by today’s caring humanists. Vide the routine patronage of Canada’s native peoples, who want reparations for having to attend Western Day Schools, neglect of their languages and cultural mores. The fact their mean age today is almost double what it would have been in their indigenous cultural heyday is irrelevant. No one asks where were the native parents or elders when the schools began. Is the question irrelevant, inane — given the restitution ardently sought by modern day elders and parents? (Please see the essay *The Thief of Genoa* that follows.) Inclusive comfort seems here to stay. Technology bestows unequaled power and seemingly boundless impertinence.

Part of that impertinence is to assume that brotherhood (i.e. kindness, generosity) can be somehow ubiquitous (excluding many whites of course). Those enamoured with the comforts and security of Western- style welfare statism, but not necessarily the effort needed to sustain it, including keeping the belly aching to a minimum, seem ever afflicted with a myopic view of history. It is that presumption of universal brotherhood which singles out Nelson Mandela for high praise (unlike say Armando Valladares, who spent years in *Castro’s* prisons without preferment or celebrity) and the flinty Afrikaner for ready contempt. May I submit that a more perfect protocol for durable resentment is hard to imagine.

THE THIEF OF GENOA

Two dated but influential books (Ronald Wright’s *Stolen Continents*, and Thomas Berger’s *A Long and Terrible Shadow*) set the tone for the native entitlement debates. The remonstrance in both books is unrelenting. Indeed, the colloquy over aboriginal loss in America seems to be intensifying. The consternation is due in part to the belief that the Europeans arriving at the time of Columbus were a particularly dastardly lot,

and numberless amends are in order.

The above two books confront the reader with stark accusations — the presumption in each being that the populations existing in North America at the time of Columbus had some transcendent right to the land other than their own cultural hegemony above the ruin and impairment of many otherwise distinct peoples who had disappeared into the archaeological abyss long before Columbus's arrival. Vide the demise of the Olmecs and Toltecs. Mr. Wright goes as far to declare that, 'There need be no conflict between sacred tradition and scientific evidence' — his avuncular reassurance that the 'Iroquois came out of this ground' sacrosanct. Maybe more so say then the many Hurons they decimated. When you can argue like that you can accuse the Pope of siring starving children, via the traditional Catholic injunction against abortion.

For me, the slights of rationality and historic authenticity in both books are many, as is the incessant fault finding and admonishment. 'Even if we suppose that their ancestors arrived 'only 15,000 years ago (a proposed archaeological minimum), they have been here thirty times longer than anyone else.' Well, the 'they' likely changed their composition in these thousands of years. We will get to the cultures whose artifacts alone attest to a circumscribed existence in due course. Modern archaeology, anthropology and history, with their late investigative tools, can explain some of the whys and wherefores, but native elders disapproval of such investigations have stymied such study.

A simple thought experiment is instructive: suppose that the culture of Columbus did not come to the Americas until say 1692. It is not probable that the descendants of Montezuma might have become the slaves and war booty of some other tribal state (if around at all), in some ways very different from the Aztecs of 1492? The main indigenous cultures in the Americas were already in a state of decline. Moreover, we have some basis for supposing that the genealogies that did survive the wars and scrimmaging did so because of the eventual demise of long-standing rivals. Many peoples and cultures did vanish in the Americas before Columbus, and not because they were sticklers about injustice and cruelty. One may avoid this denouement only by presuming that all pre-Columbian Indians constituted a 'nation', and that's akin to telling a Toltec he's just another Mayan, a Tibetan he's just another Chinese, a Croatian but another Yugoslav, or a 'Yugoslav' a native of the U.S.S.R. (I once took the Census in Canada, and one question of origin presumed the Canadians of

Estonian Latvian and Lithuanian lineage to be *from* the Soviet Union; I never got out of those households without a very stern lecture.) Neither Mr. Wright nor Justice Berger come to grips with the imperial nature of the dominions in the Americas circa 1492, a telling and I think ironic oversight. Both writers allude deferentially to the splendour of Aztec and Inca cities, yet neglect to remind the reader that splendour is one of the suspect achievements for humanists generally — because it invariably keeps the voting privileges to a minimum — and, what is important, the humanity that slowly yet eventually inspired the concept of discrete individual freedom. A freedom which tends to neutralize totemic and imperial diktats — one of the liberal legacies, however belated, of Western civilization, that many Native elders now use to scold with! Both writers seem to admire the identifiable empires of the Americas, while ignoring the ‘remorseless, inhumane skirmishing’ (Berger) that went on ‘within these empires’. One proffered excuse (quoting Bartolome de Las Casas) is telling: ‘But they were (vivisection and cannibalism) the Indian’s way of proving their devotion to their gods’— an analogy which, if accepted, in part excuses the pagan Nazi devotion to his Führer, unless say actually building stately pavilions for the vivisection and ‘sacred’ eating of Jewish teenagers would have been more culturally authentic and respectable. Justice Berger even puts in parenthesis the one ‘massacre’ he deigns to mention of whites. What both writers neglect is the inhumanity implicit in circumstances like the following (quoting Berger): ‘When he (Pizarro) reached Peru civil war had broken out among the Incas; landing at Tumbes, he found the city had already been destroyed.’ Not so ‘civil’ civil war. An entire city destroyed. And, ‘Like the Aztecs, the Incas had subjugated a host of other Indian peoples.’ Mr. Wright tries his best to butter up the subjugation, making it sound like a father-knows-best trial of sensibilities. The very order Mr. Wright so flatters is not maintained without oppression. A cursory look at the Third Reich (expressly through its own spokesmen) would have revealed majestic conference halls, imposing stadiums, and a population happily at home with its god-head Führer — a population rid of unseemly ‘undesirables’. Such that Mr. Wright is much less concerned with history than with attitude. ‘I was told by Dehatkadons, a traditional chief of the Onondaga Iroquois, you cannot discover an inhabited land. Otherwise, I could cross the Atlantic and *discover* England.’ Well, had the ancestors of the Onondaga Iroquois sailed to Europe when Europe was still more or less hide-bound (‘folks running about in Finnian bogs with their fundaments painted blue’), it would have been a momentous find. But they didn’t. The presumption here is akin,

for me, to those American Blacks who archly said of Paul Simon's *Graceland* album how great it would have been had Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder put it together! Remarked a justifiably terse Simon, "Well they didn't." In fact, the pre-Columbian native peoples had little idea of the shape of the world. Most believed they lived by themselves in a big pond. Another island as big as theirs would have been an immense discovery for them! It took energumen *like* the conquistadors to actually *defy* their own limitations and comforts, the basic ingredient of all strivers (curiosity alone limits unknown risk) who undertake exploration. Cupidity and luck certainly helped their exploits, but to emphasize these to the exclusion of all else is itself a racist slur. They established a control over their lives without recourse to immutable, intractable guarantees. They did it more or less on their own, their own ferocity perhaps abetted by the many blood sacrifices they must have witnessed. The sophistry on the book jacket of Justice Berger's book is instructive. The imputation is that God made the land — but that it was given to the Indians — which many individual tribes held on to, we learn, by 'seasoned military might' — and were not about to give (what God granted) away. Indeed, the problem with allotting such entitlements is that one cannot find a way through the labyrinth without adopting a didactic bias. The confusions are riff otherwise. John Marshall, an early American Supreme Court Justice, whom Justice Berger quotes at length, is not much help. 'He (Marshall) accepted the legitimacy of Native sovereignty, Native institutions and Native Title to the Land,' yet had no means of deciding which Native tribes were entitled to the sovereignty they then enjoyed — unless warfare and cultural gravity provide the 'legitimate' accounting after all. 'The Indians regarded themselves as the rightful owners of the land.' Well, many Hurons thought the Iroquois had encroached on their lands, and the Incas certainly wouldn't have conceded that the Arucanians or Mapuches had any inalienable tracts or rights let alone things like 'birthrights'. The Indian's 'warlike character', which Justice Berger never contests, subverts the inalienable nature of his 'indigenous' homeland and fondly presupposed equanimical lifestyle.

As is often the case with ideologues, they unerringly select the nuance that best serves their purpose. 'The word *myth* sometimes has a debased meaning nowadays,' Mr. Wright instructs us, and then goes on to show that he can adopt a myth as well as anyone. Digested history, he asserts, is largely myth. Well, history is not myth, unless you're susceptible to 'myth makers' like, say, Jim Keegstra (the Alberta school teacher who said the ritual killing of Jews in Germany was a fiction). The grimmer aspects of

that mass murder have long since been diligently chronicled. As are questions about the progress of the 100 Years War in Europe. But nowhere in his book does Mr. Wright contend with indigenous myth making, which has a wonderful vividness and universality that fascinates today. All Indian peoples have their own peculiar and wondrous Genesis and Revelations. I suspect Mr. Wright's privileged and secure Western upbringing has done for him what it's done for a lot of Western folk: make pagan cultures the adventure that upstages the bland, orderly setting back home, the discovery of one's own circumstance and history as boring, as he himself concedes. The captivation of the fearless 'savage' has become a staple in American filmmaking, a fascination the Puritan Thanksgiving Fathers weren't attuned to. A reminder that studiously cultivating your own garden, as the early Fathers did, hasn't many dramatic climaxes. A subject not to be slighted though, because such tending reveals resourcefulness.

For instance, Mr. Wright makes short shrift of the wheel and plow as measures of civilization, claiming that harnessable oxen and horses were not indigenous to the Americas. Well llamas and some varieties of deer were, and the Incas he praises for domesticating llamas. To assume the wheel would not have been a considerable help to some Aztec or Mayan engineers (and was not therefore missed) is a tautology, as is the slighting of the plow to more productively till Mayan or Cherokee croplands. He says nothing about learning to smelt iron ore.

So easily is Mr. Wright browned off by white pretensions that he belittles even the value freedom might have had for pre-Columbian Indians, and infers that those who value freedom *from* tribal byways for indigenous peoples, are somehow genocidal, as he says of Mario Vargas Llosa's belief in assimilation. 'Social Darwinist Capitalism,' he calls it. How earnestly the ideologue can speak for silent millions, in the name of understanding! Instead, Mr. Wright will euphemistically speak of 'tribal territories, often without fixed boundaries, and interpenetrating rights to the same stretches of land.' Interpenetrating rights! Please remember the word 'interpenetrating', Mr. Wright likes it a lot, as in his mention of '(A) small warrior tribe (the Aztecs) freebooting through the remains of the Toltec empire.' A people 'specialized in smiting enemies and leading (their) people to a promised land,' who 'began modestly, fishing and working as mercenaries in wars between the other states.' We even learn, in a rare candid aside, that: 'Both (Aztecs and Spaniards) were warlike, mercantile people, avaricious and quick to resort to force. Both believed they had a divine mission to rule

the world.' And that the 'winner' proved to be a cad — why? Well, in part because his religion did not manifest 'interpenetrating and kaleidoscopic conceptualizations of nature, time and space.' When your definition is that wooly, you need a lot of gods, and a very diffuse methodology — note how scholars today interminably debate the essential meaning and intent of religion itself, whether or not it is even universal, thus further attenuating our handle on all ancient belief and ritual. Why should we assume, given our own dizzying array of belief and practice, that the ancients were any less restless and variegated? The Aztecs 'worried constantly that the sun might weaken and die and the universe end in cataclysm,' an anxiety that required 'lavish sacrifices' — which may have kept the victims of neglect, at least among war captives, to a minimum. 'Amerindians always sensed the toll that human life takes from the environment.' In short, an unforgiving Nature required her 'due'.

Unlike Justice Berger, Mr. Wright gets exceedingly coy and avuncular about human sacrifice. 'Human sacrifice was...not the persistence of an old *savage* practice among civilized people who should have known better but rather a hypertrophy of sinister elements in their culture, which in more gracious times (which aren't specified) had been kept in check.' If there is a more apt and serviceable apologia for the Holocaust I've not read it — the hypertrophy of sinister elements in a civilized people who should have known better. I also suspect that Mr. Wright's knowledge of surgery is also somewhat facile. 'The Aztecs were used to the spectacle of death, but the quick death of an obsidian knife.' Well, the act of getting out a heart, whether or not still pulsating, is I think less than 'quick'.

But even the fluent Mr. Wright cannot neglect all the incommodious facts. The classic age of the Maya was long in decline when Columbus arrived. 'By 1492, Tikal (a major classic Mayan city) had been abandoned for 600 years.' Yet Mr. Wright can imagine a brilliant recovery but for Columbus et al, despite past 'imperial ambitions... led by aggressive kings in the fifteenth century. Most damaging was the secession of the Cakchequels, a branch of the Quiches who broke away around 1475 to found their own state. The parting was acrimonious, and the two fought border wars for years.' Records 'reveal that coups d'état and family feuds were as common in ancient as in modern Guatemala.' It appears the Mayans managed to kill many of their own on their own. But to absolve the Mayans, Mr. Wright insinuates a Mexican influence. He notes that the stately Mayan capitals reveal Mexican designs. And this gem: 'One imagines that the food served in these royal halls was equally swayed by Mexican

vogue — the chilies hotter and the chocolate sweeter than Mayas really liked.’ As a result, Mayan mathematicians tended to fart a lot; being a smelly bunch they got a lot of uninterrupted study time, meaning they accomplished a lot...well, is this proposition any less fanciful than a sovereign population eating what they didn’t like?

Mr. Wright’s assessment of the Incas is also more commiserative than the Aztecs. They made great fun, apparently, of the Requirement, the exhortation to Christ which was touted to bring amelioration from the Conquistadores — a slighted formality, but not of the kind the Incas tolerated from say the Puna Islanders. I’ve always found it hard to imagine warfare as ‘a practical matter’ (no ideology), but this is the tack Mr. Wright takes with the Incas. Comments that tell how the Incas ‘encouraged independent kingdoms to join their empire peacefully’ strike me as facile. The sort of intellectual pimping for Marx that continues in our day, as if imperiums sanctioned independent kingdoms.

The account of slavery is nonexistent in Mr. Wright’s book, and particularly adventitious in Justice Berger’s. A very sore point with some historians is the resistance they face from influential humanists when they try to determine the extent of the collusion of Native peoples themselves, Indian and Coloured, in abetting the slave trade, and in sustaining their own ethnic subjugation practices. (The Ashanti, for instance.) Many if not most universities in North America tacitly discourage or even berate the attempt to do the research. Yet the indictment cannot be ignored. Justice Berger does admit a few comments like the following: ‘The traditional enmities between the tribes (enmities, remember) facilitated the development of the Indian slave trade.’ And: ‘After defeating the Tupinamba, the Portuguese armed them to serve as auxiliaries against the neighbouring Caete, seizing thousands more as slaves.’ And: ‘Settlers would hire mercenaries to lead parties of friendly Indians along the great waterways...where they would take entire villages into slavery.’ And: ‘The settlers armed another tribe, the Savannahs, and the Savannahs made war against the Westtos.’ In turn, Yamassees, Cherokees, Creeks and Catawbs attacked the Tuscaroras. And so on. ‘The Indians’ paramount concern with access to European trade goods made all the difference.’ All the difference — a bartering trade that yielded guns, knives, utensils, sugar and coffee. Metal hoes and scythes for slash and burn agriculture (the Tupi), metal axes to shorten the time to build thatched-roof houses and canoes, fishing with metal hooks, and steel knives for hunting. Such covetousness is hardly the whetstone to berate Europeans for not playing according to exemplary rules. The

'long and terrible shadow' such tribes brought on, to some extent, by their own human self-interest and seasoned truculence. Disease was perhaps the decisive catastrophe, yet smallpox and the other 'Western' diseases were making the rounds in a shrinking world. Sooner or later the calamity would have come. While the Europeans stolidly coped with things like smallpox, Amerindians would sooner or later have had to do the same. A defensive health 'apartheid' worldwide was not in the cards. Contending with disease is a way of life. Ardent exertion helps keep one robust, and that robustness dwindles when one becomes a submissive ward of another. Should we be surprised then that 'The Indian nations were seasoned military powers, used to fighting in the North American territories.' Used to fighting. Seasoned. Kindly, humanitarian, courteous warriors. The not-so-universal soldier. Determined to protect what is theirs — that which is not held in common. The salient fact is that tribes like the Iroquois and Hurons, Cherokee and Mohawks, were rivals because they couldn't decide what to hold in common, or whose rich folk were the most undeserving. In neither book is the retributive aspect of things like the potlatch considered. Yet we are assured that humanitarian values were 'shared' — by seasoned military powers. The whole sorry saga of the changing, dissolving mercenary Indian alliances that accompanied Indian resettlement may be nothing more than historic momentum, the deciding variables of sagacity, versatility and resiliency working themselves through the cultural equations.

Unfortunately, when we get to current day Central America, Justice Berger's politics become paramount. Marx is a non player in his book, white Americans the *bête noir*. After a careful reading of his chapter on Guatemala, it is still not clear why the 'resilient' Guatemalan (Mayan) Indians, who far outnumbered both the mestizos and the descendants of the conquistadores, were not more adept in establishing their own hegemony. We are told that 'in two years over two million men, women and children, had been coerced to participate in an organization ostensibly aimed at disabling of a few thousand mestizos' — the 'Orwellian nightmare' the U.S. created. The minority successors of the cruel, defiantly independent conquistadores, and their imitators (the majority of mestizos) served as the Yankee stooges. Justice Berger's sense of birth rights is also confounding here. For instance, how can one possibly deal rationally with statements like the following: 'The loss of their birthright (in Chile) is a violation of collective human rights that for the Mapuche is a tragedy beyond measure, perhaps beyond remedy.' Laying aside the semantic ambiguity of 'collective human rights' (individuals may be granted rights; collectivities usually impose sanctions on

their assorted populaces). If Columbus had not come when he did, the Incas might finally have conquered the Mapuches and effaced their culture but for a few artifacts that intrigue modern archaeologists. So ‘birthright’ may be, in effect, a banal concept. Who in fact has a birthright to anything in this world other than his own skin? When you come to the example of accomplished and influential Indians like Benito Juarez, who believes Indian culture must change fundamentally, leave behind its tribal affinities, the long terrible shadow begins to pale even more!

Justice Berger’s concept of sustainability is another tropism sufficiently modern to disturb the scrupulous sensibilities. He believes Canadian Natives are entitled to vast and exclusive tracts of land and water they may harvest, fish and mine, the goods sold in open contemporary markets. Well, the tools that trappers, loggers and fishermen prize derive from a Western industrial technology Indians find more and more hazardous to the environment and refuse to help sustain, even conduct wildcat demonstrations to shut it down — a technology that allows efficient mining, logging, drilling and manufacturing, which native populations often archly, self-righteously disrupt, impede. The inconvenience caused to a much larger population of no importance. Yet native populations insist on selling, on the open market, select quantities of fish, timber and ore they get from tenured real estate worked with the deft tools of modernity. It seems to me one cannot in all self-respecting earnestness insist on all three: the exclusive tenured land and water, the modern technological tools, and an open market in which to sell goods. If our native peoples insist on title to exclusive tracts of land and water and modern implements, should they demand entry into an open market?

Secondly, there is a fundamental contradiction in the contention that on the one hand Native cultures are resilient and fluent on their own, yet somehow become impoverished, infirm if sponsorship and subsidy is forfeit. Native leaders bitterly complain about the Residential School System in Canada, which they claim subverted, indeed almost erased, their culture. But is it impertinent to ask where were such ardent, like minded native elders and parents when the schools opened? If native culture cannot revive itself with government subsidy and patronage, then its custodians should may be less vindictive toward the people that elected that government! Which, by and large, may mean living first and foremost here in Canada *as* Canadians! And surviving as do say Vietnamese, Tibetan, and Tamilian Canadians. Not becoming ever more separate from, or antagonistic to, a Canadian identity. My former neighbour, an

Ugandan Asian, had to leave the country of his birth in twenty-four hours with little more than the shirt on his back. He and his kind have been a benefit for Canada, are here to stay, while their faith and culture remain intact.

The presumption that our Native Indians cannot survive without ample subsidy and patronage of their customs and language — can't thrive in a country as undemanding and laden with social benefits as Canada — may mean that they're guided by Elders who in fact have chosen to be unadaptable for reasons too esoteric for their own good.

Bill Reid's famous spirit canoe at the Vancouver Airport Terminal is exceedingly top heavy, overloaded with gigantic aboriginal deities. Not seaworthy at all!!

RIGHTEOUS ISIS

(The following passage is taken from my novel Fair Game. Mason Bascule, the novel's pensive protagonist, witnesses — to better understand radical Islam — an ISIS recruitment seminar.)

With his new facial makeup, new identity papers, and his 'preloved' clothes, Mason felt reasonably assured he could pass as an interested loner. Thus, giving over to a method performance, he climbed to the upstairs floor of an abandoned storefront two day's later where he was promptly scanned and presented with a register for his name, address, occupation and language skills. After this scrutiny he was left to join a small congregation of 17 men — he was the 18th — in a barren room with a single desk in front. He was the last to enter. He was surprised to find a nondescript group you might find at a sports event or cinema. He was further surprised to see only five non-whites, and all of these earnestly talking with their neighbours. Only two in the group sported beards. A couple in the back even glanced his way. One nodded as he entered. "Good show," he said, offering a hand. For the first time Mason wondered if he'd overdone the disguise. All the men here seemed typically acculturated if not home grown Americans? Only a little less blazé, insouciant, perhaps.

A ruddy muscular man with rimless glasses and a shock of white hair entered and placed a folder on the desk. He stoically looked about the room and stated, "God willing, we will begin." This was followed by a short invocation in Arabic. Looking again about the room with what Mason imagined a headmaster's propriety he said,

“We are fortunate today to hear from a recent convert who speaks with an eloquence few of us master. His words are a beacon of light in this dark age. Please welcome the exceptional Naguib Elamin.”

The applause was prolonged, or so Mason thought, as he wrestled with the unsettling suspicion that he knew this newcomer — had in fact gone to school with him. As the recognition registered, he could barely believe his senses: the man then standing before them, this inspiring charismatic convert, despite his robe, straggly blond beard and brown turban, was none other than Dirk Church, now known as Naguib Elamin. Who promptly began his presentation with the old pernicious Charlie Manson calumny about Jews which, given the approbation and ready laughter that greeted it, was a favourite trope here. If Mason anticipated a barrage of callous cynicism he knew Dirk capable of, he was shocked by the tailor-made invective for this attentive crowd. No audience like a credulous, engrossed audience! So he surmised. If he worried about his own identity, he soon believed Dirk was sufficiently caught up in his arch contumely and the raptness of his audience to see only a crowd that responded as one — including himself — the opening a screed one that beguiled witness. Made one a voyeur.

“We are often told there is no humour in Islam. That we cannot laugh at life. Well consider this: without anti-Semitism the Jew would cease to exist. Anti-Semitism is the defining karma for the Jew. Assimilation is his death knell, the marginal member the key danger. His touted singularity — as the Chosen People of God — lapses when he’s but another gamecock. Even the appeal of science and the arts can default. He needs to be singled out to be satisfied, his deeds conspicuous, unrivalled. Anti-Semitism is a meme, a reassurance of singularity, of peerless disparity! The *handmaid* to equality’s guillotine. Curious the Jewish God told so few about His Chosen People. Was he finally a little embarrassed maybe? Just remember: the Jew excels at everything — including getting persecuted.

This gamy testimonial elicited protracted laughter. Mason winced. The question of anti-Semitism was for him but another historic clumping of perversity, a conclusion he knew could be considered anti-semitic in some quarters. His own motley ancestors would be among the guilty and the vanquished in such carnage. The few Jews he knew were exceptional, independent, resourceful folk. Their very shrewdness and insularity sometimes daunting. Vide the deft Holocaust revisionist David Cole! Or a formidable writer like the flinty Hannah Arendt, who would write half *The Origins of*

Totalitarianism in footnotes. Such exacting scholarship always impugned it seemed. He felt ever deficient, even possibly culpable around such erudition. Confusion was no excuse. In the end he feared he was simply maybe too stolid or restive, if not stupid, to comprehend such subtlety, such rarified nuance. The growing loathing of European whites generally was for him as disheartening. He now resented the malicious Dirk the more for reminding him of his ever haunting limitations as the maniac ventured on.

“The assimilated or liberal Jew becomes just another buccaneer in the sea of cut throat businessmen, promotors, judiciary hacks and government controllers and busy-bodies. Note, the U.S. can never adopt enough government regulations — because Americans have no spiritual core, no residual integrity left. If there’s no majority consensus about right and wrong, who’s left to abide by an agreement? Ever more elaborate rules, laws and policies make enforcement desultory and deviance self-sustaining. *America’s* Jews have, by and large, been blessed, affluent America’s want of self-regulatory morals a boon for the clever huckster. Indeed, America’s ventures in the Middle East, which have caused much instability, were spurred in part by a fervid Christian-lobby allied to a military-industrial nexus that seeds distrust to boost its importance. Oil has been a major player there, as well as anxiety over Islam Iran’s purported research into the making of nuclear weapons. If that lobby is less favoured today, it’s because it has fewer adherents among the new ardent feminist utopians. The world’s new lordly love mongers.”

Ready laughter surfaced here.

“Today the new omniscient progressive is a romantic who wants to atone for his culture’s sins — all the exacting traditional beliefs and their adherents. Bless her/him. Christianity is becoming, as we’ve seen, a rather wormy moribund creed. On the one hand an emerging protestant playground for holy-woke trendoids, on the other a Pope whose opportunistic activism has inspired dismay among some of his own devout. He’s even patronizing aspects of liberalism in the hope of salvaging his bromidic church and dwindling clergy, such as profusely apologizing to Canada’s native population for the Catholic residential school system. Consider that Canada’s early Catholics readily enrolled native children into their residential schools, begging the question of native coherence and resolve! Was their no elder-parent oversight at the time? Was a school’s curriculum never apprised? Were the deaths of native children a commonplace? Was native anger and recrimination today so lacking early on?

“Indeed, the Pope rarely mentions Jesus any more, just the destitute and dispossessed, periodically washing everybody’s feet to affirm his benevolence. Select individuals of course. While his Cardinals mimic the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Vatican Bank discretely allocates its money — well, it would wouldn’t it, being so reliant on shrewd accountants who vet the tithes, donations and charities that help keep the same Rome clergy in creature comforts. Talk about the evils of sinecures, laundered money and bottom up sex! Like the hedge fund brokers — almost anything goes. Behind the confessional.”

More enthusiastic applause. Mason tried to smile at the sly innuendo, and wryly fancied asking questions about some Muslim exploits — such as religious apartheid, female thraldom as multiple wives minding many children, humble worshippers sustaining a remote privileged class, the frequent use of aliens to build cities and palaces — or some Gulf States, according to Amnesty International, turning away Syrian refugees, thus slighting the Ummah’s espousal of kinship. But he knew there were *other* gremlins here, *other historic* gremlins: the impetuous way the WWI victors played musical chairs with their coveted Mandates in the Middle East, arbitrarily setting boundaries, dislocating language and culture, facilitating the seamy future of political meddling and excising of native leaders — the Shaw of Iran being one of the dour replacements. So he remained silent, musing how honouring the day’s late PC zeitgeist was to ride shotgun for the approved love-mongers — those who would obliterate discrete discriminative culture. Just as well, for Dirk was on a role.

“And talking about sex. Pray note the progressive sex education that’s now being jammed down American youngsters’ throats. Inspired by progressives who tout broad spectrum identification — such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, pan-gender, intra-gender, bi-curious, pan-sensual, situational gender, asexual, transabled, limb hacker nulos — literally asexual: no outside parts at all — cis-female and -male, the cis-male being the ugly Western pig who’s raping twenty percent of college women — much of this exotic fauna for grade school kids. In and out of school! One enlightened Facebook guru posits as many as 58 sexual varieties — more to follow I daresay — and urges the removal the sex identification from birth certificates, sex being deemed a peremptory if not meaningless distinction. Pay attention, it gets ravenous here. Who here knows what a TERF is? T-E-R-F. One lad quietly said, “Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist.” This provoked a few snickers. “And why is that contentious?” Naguib asked. The responder matter-of-factly stated: “Transgender

men — men becoming females — resent not being considered women by some feminists because they have no vagina, just, well, an expensive, aromatic purse, in some cases.” More abiding laughter over which Naguib asserted, “Indeed. All opposing views are regarded as bigoted and illegitimate — the travesty of identity presumption. You try to combine or eliminate some of the above sex groupings and the PC hyenas will, in all likelihood, tear you limb from limb, including self-mutilating nulos. One daring traditional feminist — yes, there still are such fossils — has selflessly suggested that men changed into women aren’t really women because their artificial vaginas smell different than regular women — dissimilar bacteria at large, perhaps. So, the modern smell test. Any volunteers? For the new ‘menstrual’ show?”

This nearly brought the house down. After gesturing for calm Naguib resumed.

“There’s even dismissive names for traditional behaviour — mansplaining, whitesplaining, straightsplaining, menterrupting, bropriating — the short list. Also, of traditional masculinity itself, derogations like toxic masculinity, testosterone poisoning, rape-gendering. What the Founding Fathers missed. The poor sots. The WOC — Women of Color — is now WOC/Non-binary POC — People of Color! In other words, there’s no actual male and female beings any more, or any meaningful ethnicity, tradition or IQ, only a morass that’s perpetually guessing Who’s really Who, and Who’s on First and shouldn’t be! Even ROTC candidates have been urged to march in women’s shoes I understand, as if women had no say in the shoes they wear. It’s so obvious they want us to win — their senior officers in women’s shoes — the new feminized warrior. The modern feminist who imagines herself sovereign except for an aberrant quirk of circumstance. I mean, how can she prove yourself a strong, astute player if someone won’t protect her from the horny ‘man-babies’ My God, you risk getting pregnant!”

The applause here was nearly asthmatic.

“But wait — you ‘ain’t heard nothin’ yet’! Even star athletes yearn to become feminist idols, the new lionesses. Brucey, so sorry — Caitlyn! — Jenner spends hours and hours in the media flogging a fine self-dramatic role, so heedful of his splendid ‘debutante balls’, as one canny writer put it. Let’s face it: *American glasnost and perestroika would blush a yak!*”

The laughter here became convulsive, the high fives home run hits. Dirk happily waited, then held up his referee hands.

“Consider also that Charlie Hebdo has bit the dust — no more arty cartoons of the Prophet — none, zilch — whereas Andres Serrano’s Piss Christ — a crucifix in a gallon of his own urine — is considered great art. Originally funded by the National Endowment for the Arts! Obviously a lot of people want to know which pot to piss in. We can help out here.”

Again, nearly helpless laughter, which Dirk patiently waited out, then: “ — Take the clamorous Black community. It continues to Cry the Blues, yet no one in the black community feels any responsibility whatever, no one. Many Democrats even sidle up to supporters of NWA — Nigaz Wit Attitude — whose iconic rap song is ‘Fuck tha Police’ and, like the African Internationalists, seek to demean if not destroy all vestiges of White Western civilization and culture. Some openly encourage killing white people. Many, many Americans will be attacked, beaten up, stabbed, shot in the next 24 hours — yet the American media will remain highly selective in identifying the perpetrators. The earlier Integration movement is now the Diversity movement — diversity meaning specified groups exponentially entitled! One big name white gal, Rachel Dolezak desperately wanted to be black. Frizzed her hair, dyed her skin. Presented herself as a role model, a black activist dissing white people — today’s cat bird seat — until her white parents had had enough. Anyway, the lady inspired a very fine new word — ‘wigger’. Which rhymes with — ‘giggler’, right?”

The laughter remained intermittently convulsive, audience members still pasting high fives. Mason managed to slap a couple himself. He couldn’t remember being more gruesomely entertained.

“Yes — the new patricians are exceedingly touchy these days. Think of all the ‘trigger warnings’, the sinister ‘microaggressions’ foisted on them by traditionalist ogres — yes, microaggressions — faintly unpleasant ideas or behaviours as full-scale offences. There’s now a litany of such affronts: microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations and, for the poorly endowed pinhead, microrape.”

If the laughter here was slow in coming, as much from replete amusement as confusion, Mason thought, it reached a crescendo second-to-none before it abated. Had he ever witnessed such suave invective?

“The academic blether here — the micro insult — is for anal masochists only. The squalid behaviour is, I quote, ‘Characterized by predatory non-physical prurient communications with the intent to penetrate the victim’s emotional security on the basis of heteronormative impositions.’ Ah ha. Got that? Hetero usually means

heterosexual or ‘heteroaromatic’. Nonetheless — loads, piles and piles of ugly smelly normative. No number given. What to do? Just spell Indigenous with a capital ‘I’, and give the current 58 sex subsets a thumbs up okay.” General laughter. “As for the left overs, those who still think of themselves as conventional men and women, the dead again believers — they’re becoming the new pariahs, America’s ‘deplorables’. But hang on! Some of these are actually turning into canny realists who are even now considering the validity of sturdy shared principles — as in Islamic law and practice! Bless them. One might well think they can’t wait for us to win. *They can’t wait for us to win!* It’s what you — you! — were born to do. Show them the way! The light! Allāhu Akbar!”

A hush followed, graced with some reverent invocations of the Prophet. Mason was manifestly speechless, which some others seemed to interpret as awe. One chap duly smiled, nodded his way. Rarely had Mason ever felt so inept, so isolated.

“Some of you may have seen the obscene Tot’s and Tiaras, where fathers, mothers parade three- and four-year-olds as fussed over beauty queen goddesses — about as invincibly idiotic and obtuse as American mania gets. Infantile cheer leaders with nothing to cheer. There are stories even of grade school teachers teaching young white girls to learn to cry for being white, to get them off on the right foot, so to speak — young lads being more or less hopeless one assumes. It’s quite simple, really, Americans are turning into a bunch of hoary tasteless bat-shit crazies — who have no prospect of joy or fulfillment. Scolding, rebuking the undeserving is their lone vocation. Only their electronic toys distract. They can only engage digital game boards and video psych-outs — dollish and sado porno clinches co-opting most cable viewing today. Look too at much Western pop music. Coddled baboon acts, diarrhetic words — not really words but endless mouthing — the ‘groovy’ stuff — so *rad, fab, brutal, tits*. ‘Monotonous projective vomiting’ one writer called it. The contorted faces of inane pop idols in splendid agony. How you dramatize piles perhaps. One enduringly popular song, less noxious than some — ‘I’m Ready’ — which gets repeated ad nauseam — sounds like a four-year-old on a potty waiting for his dear mother to come and wipe him off. Take the fulsome omniscient beat away and what do you have left — an eerie wasteland.”

More ready laughter.

“As for Western classical music — the so-call classic symphonic stuff. All that emotion.”

Here Mason listened with a particular dread.

“It’s nothing more than the *Requiem* for Western civilization. It’s all there — the terrible fulsome catharsis. The realization that regret, sadness, melancholy is all there is. The only real feeling left. That’s all, folks!”

More self-satisfied laughter. Here Mason almost raised his hand. He believed unsurpassed lyricism and the rich polyphony often accompanying it to be indeces of solicitude, serenity, joy — his ‘euphonic stuff’! As for traditional classical music, what about musical wits like Gioachino Rossini? But he feared mention of say Grieg’s Rigaudon, Figaro’s aria, let alone a sylvan trobairitz, could merely incite more derisive laughter. Dirk was surely just nodding to tin-eared naysayers. Once on a howling roller coaster — tone-deaf when you get off. Still, it was a blow Mason had no pugnacity to fend off.

“Look at Western fashion. *Haut couture* they call the best of it. Humans dressed up as aliens. Arrogance enshrined. Some of you may not know the word ‘insouciance’. You should. What you get when you market anarchy — unlimited variation. ‘Middle class’ is the peerless derogatory term favoured by America’s urbane cognoscente. Indeed, America’s middle class is shrinking — yet paying much of the taxes. Only the poor and very rich are multiplying. And the very rich are as removed from reality as any beings in history as they hoard their money and salve themselves with foundations that often actually augment their precious prerogatives. Vide the Rainbow Coalition. The ‘colour’ white presumably banned, in disgrace. Some American wealthy even lavish money on our Democrat shills who seem keenly in favour of the dissolution — in effect championing broad spectrum immigration, relaxing long-standing codes to do so, and reserving punishment mainly for recalcitrant whites. No one, however, is paying much attention to the humungous American subsidy debt. Taxing the wealthy to the hilt will only run the government for a month or two after all. Indeed several American cities have been bankrupted paying their civic employees salaries and pensions! The accumulated deficit itself since the Clintons was nearly 17 trillion dollars! And, given current trends, could be 22-23 trillion by the end of the current presidency. Americans simply shrug. Their trusted economists say ‘just create more easement — print money and buy up and repackage stale bonds and investments.’ Enough suckers to buy them or sharpies to score with them. What does that tell you? Think of the growing number of Americans who cannot afford to buy homes or products made in America. Even food is becoming an exorbitant commodity. Think

of the abandoned malls that attract archival photographers. American infrastructure is also a mess but no one really dares confront it. There's no money! And now, with the coming legalization of euthanasia, the social advisement for it can't be far off — how the old and infirm, the growing burdensome constituencies, may be dealt with. While the new street drugs, ever more addictive and 'affordable', will insure a growing population of dead beats, particularly young men with little education, few jobs, their very *masculine* presence demeaned, such that they often find themselves to be INCELS — involuntary celibates — especially before the recognized reality that fewer and fewer Western women desire babies *or* marriage, relegating such men even more superfluous! Indeed, abortion remains a thriving practice in the U.S. Such dedicated removal experts. Even late trimester kiss-offs — the auction of baby parts being a recent seminal spat. A film about Planned Parenthood abortion practices was recently banned by PP itself. The scragging must be done *sub rosa*, so the humane progressives can continue to be 'humane'. Ardent progressives claim that failing to disclose your HIV status to a sex partner is a human right. You can choose to infect a partner with a consequential disease, so you won't feel isolated, embarrassed. Humane!"

A strained silence followed, many heads shaking in disbelief.

"Humane. A great 'high'. One state legislature made marijuana use and same sex marriage legal on the same day — meaning fewer inopportune babies to disturb the highs, I guess. Gays must be stoned first it seem. It's obvious Westerners crave release *not* obligation. And who's babies will fill the gap? Islam's babies!"

The spontaneous uproar was robust and sustained. Dirk had to work his hands to quiet the lively response. When the cheering finally abated he said, "One late characterization of America from acknowledged expert Bernard Lewis" — here Dirk paused as the anticipation grew — 'America is harmless as an enemy, treacherous as a friend.'"

Renewed spirited applause.

"As for the rest of the planet's congregants? Well, Hinduism is now a venal business venture. Like many Asian 'isms'. All the other creeds — and there are scads of them, from the rants of health faddists to venal product gurus — are essentially bric brac. And they are all — all! — every last one, wary of us. None have the stamina nor vision to oppose us openly. They even shy away from facing us directly on the battlefield. They use drones — more electronic game playing. A craven, major white news caster, felt obliged to fabricate stories of his own heroism before such surety. Can

you imagine? The guilt is ubiquitous. Yes, scared shitless — who wouldn't be in a bat-shit crazy society, a society that touts nothing precious except that of so-called liberty — when you remind them of it — which they've spent eons trying to define, and are now more undecided, more vindictively argumentative about the subject than ever. *Keenly intolerant of all unsanctioned tolerance* — the new PC evangelical diktat! Meaning, in the end: stagnation, fossilization, no one daring to act except the ever more rabid castigators. Because they are lost and scared! Think of the ‘courageous’ journalists and writers who routinely question the permissiveness, the flagrancy of free speech and its *sina qua non*, parody, because they know they are perfectly safe doing it. Think of the university professors who fear for their careers if they use the wrong pronoun or dwell too long on traditional learning. Major universities now turn down speakers critical of the new imperiousness, bless them! Yes. Bill Mahr from Berkeley, Christine LeGarde from Smith College — because the multclits see the IMF as crusader tainted — Condoleezza Rice from Rutgers, the apostate Ayan Hirsi Ali from Brandeis — a bloody Jewish university! — Robert Birgeneau from Haverford, Ann Coulter from several campuses. Jeremy Skahill in *The Intercept* adroitly argues that the use of drones is not only cowardly and immoral but illegal! What does all this tell you? Cowardly, immoral and illegal! It's too bloody obvious — they want us to win! They can't wait for us to win. *They can't wait for us to win!* Provide them with a culture that abolishes contrived ambiguity. It's what you — *you!* — were born to do — blow the asinine place to kingdom come!"

A sudden standing ovation was sustained, an applause Dirk fondly waited out.

“Let’s remove the poor souls from the miasma of ‘anything goes’, of over-leveraged democracy, of *I can’t get no satisfaction*. Hardly a mystery. They spend as much time gaming — screwing with Lady Luck — as diligently praying to a knowing and thus exacting God! Even President Obama was concerned about the ‘less than loving expressions by Christians themselves’ — all those Christians so less appealing than himself — a late ostensible leader of the free world. What does this tell you: he’s maybe already on board. *Already on board!*”

These comments resulted in another standing ovation, which Dirk happily acknowledged. Holding up his hands for a further pause, he concluded with: “In short: Americans yearn for release, for a sturdy social structure. For a faith that doesn’t cave in to cavillers. And only we can give it to them! Only we! The pure emphatic Islam. And you — *you!* You are the long-awaited heralds, the invincible enablers! The

holy holy warriors! The soul and sword of Mohammed! Allāhu Akbar!”

The appause remained sustained. If Mason was appalled, he was also impressed with the sweep and poignancy of the harangue to a captive and all but consecrated audience. An audience he still marvelled at because of its un-anticipated whiteness — suggestively an upper crust college class! Some of what was cited he also found regrettable — Obama’s derogatory comments about Christians just after the wholesale massacre of Christian students in Kenya — but the exaggerations were possible he thought because of the growing Western malaise of heady, seductive normlessness. What Emile Dirkheim called *Anomie*. Deciding, by and large, on the fly, free of constraint, of all dated, timeworn precepts. The new PC wardens discounted most norms because norms always discriminate, and facts were always somehow suspect — those Steven Pinker marshalled for instance: more people worldwide growing old, a decline in maternal mortality, more growth in the last 50 years than the previous 2 million years of human existence, far less mortal violence and disease, much less crime overall, more real equality, even less absolute poverty. Was this all a Western ruse, a vainglorious academic wile? Sadly, the day’s opportunistic political class had little stake in freedom. Unfettered, resourceful people decide their own fate. Better having a growing retrofitted, social justice constituency, solemnly dissing invidious achievement, success, luck — a constituency given manifests of excuse, of entitlement. The long-term trusted electorate. The question even he debated was whether humanity was smart enough to realize the benefice of freedom. You can make a mess of your life in a culturally vacuous, entitlement-immured society with very little effort — one of the realities he confronted almost daily, porno-druggi-jihadi Ryan being a frightful example. He was also now, as the session drew to a close, wondering how he would get out of the place with a minimum of fuss. Intense discussion groups were forming, Dirk — Naguib Elamin — being fulsomely patronized and ebullient in his encouragement as he shook hands and fielded questions. “Your message all Americans must hear,” one devotee said to general consent. The group then about Dirk readily concurred.