The Sex Life of the Nineteenth Century

An Autobiographical Approach to the History of Western Civilization

Featuring

Why did Henry James kill Daisy Miller?

John Emerson

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2014

Preface

This book is pedagogical in organization and intent and is appropriate for introductory college classes in French, American, or world literature and AP high school classes in these areas. With proper supplementation it can also be used for an introductory class on Western Philosophy and Sexology.

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Why Did Henry James Kill Daisy Miller?

Here comes my sister!
She's an American girl.

Randolph Miller

The American girl is different. Daisy Miller horrified European America and much of Europe with her cheerful boldness, so Henry James killed her with a villainous miasma. Why?

There are two stories in *Daisy Miller*. First, the comedy of manners: an heiress goes to Europe and shocks American / European high society with her free-and-easy, potentially lewd American ways. Second, the public-health story: an heiress goes to Europe and dies of malaria. James mushes these two not-very-gripping stories together: if heiress A is the same person as heiress B, the feeling of meaning emerges.

Was the lovely moonlit night at the Coliseum the villainous miasma? Were the greasy, mustachioed Italians she consorted with the villainous miasma? Were the horrible society ladies the villainous miasma? Was Winterbourne's rejection of Daisy the villainous miasma? Did Daisy die because she had tempted God? : "*I don't care whether I have Roman fever or not!*"

Mark Twain rewrote this kind of story all the time. All he would have needed was a pious twin who (while Daisy is frolicking with an Italian) contracts malaria during a churchy moonlight visit to the Coliseum where so many Christian martyrs had died. (There are already martyr-references scattered through the book, so the retrofit would be easy). The burial scene at the so-called Protestant cemetery would be poignant — Keats and Shelley are buried there, and this would give the lewd sister something to think about during the service. (And if Daisy had sneaked off to a hotel room with Giovanelli instead of sharing that romantic evening in the moonlight with him, she might have lived to tell about it).

Unfortunately, Daisy actually died of a natural cause: malaria spread by a mosquito. Here we again bump up against the problem you have with every goddamn realist novel. In order to make something into a story, you have to give unreasonable significance to one or more facts. Balzac and Zola were aided in this task by gross superstition -- Balzac also believed in the pseudoscience of physiognomy, which deduces character from facial features. The business about the miasma striking down possibly-lewd women (but not the men with them) would have worked fine in *Beowulf* or in the Old Testament, but realism isn't supposed to be like that. Like the *long fine needle of shivered glass* that pierced the London girl's heart, Daisy's death is just a coincidence, not a tragedy. So much for that.

Daisy’s Crime

Why did Daisy need to die horribly? At the end of the story we learn that she hadn’t even put out. The Italian fortune-hunter and seducer realized early on that he wasn’t going to score, and continued the relationship out of curiosity and amazement. Daisy had not been lewd, and even if she had been lewd, the miasma would never have reached her if she had followed the sophisticated European lewdness protocols.

The first protocol is sneaking around. “*Do you call it an intrigue – an affair that goes on with such peculiar publicity?*” asks one of the horrible society ladies. When you flaunt it, that takes the fun out of gossip, since no one can get an exclusive on the story. And you dare not deny the society ladies their bit of fun.

The second requirement is to put out, but only eventually. Be demure, play hard to get, sneak around, but then succumb to the irresistible advances of the conqueror. In Winterbourne’s terms, be a coquette rather than a flirt. (In contemporary language, don’t be a cocktease). The actual libertine Arsène Houssaye never met the fictional Daisy, but if he had, he would certainly have filed an angry protest with the proper authorities. Alfred de Musset was the teen idol of his era and ate more chicken than a man ever seen, but because the

lovely and very reasonable Princess Belgiojoso never put out for him, Musset's biographer Émile Henriot accused her of being a heartless flirt and blamed her for killing him.

The third requirement of proper lewdness is remembering who you are. Daisy was a serious heiress who would have had suitors if she'd been a dog. But she failed to put the proper value on her booty, or even to realize that she was booty at all. She vaguely knew that she should be "exclusive", but didn't seem to understand that concept: *"Well, we are exclusive, my mother and I. We don't speak to everyone – or they don't speak to us. I suppose it's about the same thing*". She should have been angling for a noble spouse (as Henry Adams's Victoria Dare did, to her credit), but, in Winterbourne's words, *"Daisy and her mamma have not risen to the stage of – what shall I call it – of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a* marchese *begins. I believe that they are intellectually incapable of that conception."*

In *Daisy Miller* social-climbing Europhile Americans of Puritan heritage retain nothing of their ancestral religion but its severity of judgment, which they mobilize for the enforcement of the standards of sophisticated European corruption. (The American sewing machine heiress Winnaretta Singer didn't put out either, and with a vengeance, but she could have taught Daisy a thing or two about being an heiress).

The Frankish Male

Since the beginning of time the males of the various Frankish tribes have devoted themselves to the pursuit of adventure, romance, loose women, heiresses, and fortunes. All of Frankish life is organized around these themes, the way American life is organized around the Horatio Alger success-worship story, which also involves heiresses. (Someone should write a book about this.) Loose women and heiresses are two categories to be kept strictly separate, and that was Daisy's biggest mistake. Loose women are sexy and expensive, whereas heiresses (wives) are sexless and wealthy and primarily useful for financing the pursuit of loose women. A good French father uses his daughter's booty as a legal instrument for the purpose of conveying his wealth to a golddigger son-in-law he hates. This produces a richly elaborated dual sexual regime within which men ignore their wives, by preference making love to other men's wives or to shortlived pauper ladies -- e.g. *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and *Dame aux Camelias,* three tubercular roles based on two actual tuberculars . If Daisy had understood Frankish customs regarding legal instruments better, Henry James would not have had to kill her.

What was Henry James' motive?

We know that it was Henry James and no one else who killed Daisy Miller. James did not kill Daisy because he shared society's view that her behavior was scandalous and intolerable, or Winterbourne's milder version of that same judgment; these judgments were not his, but part of the story he told. But it may be that he felt that he had to kill Daisy to protect himself (and his book) against Daisy's fate. As it was, the book outraged many, and if Daisy had blithely returned to Schenectady and New York to wreak havoc there, the outrage would have been much more intense. Furthermore, if Daisy had returned to the United States without anything really big happening – for example, if she had returned married to Winterbourne — it would have been anticlimactic. The demands of the story meant that Daisy had to die or something, and death was the only storyteller's ending that would not have made James' book too shocking to publish.

> **Note:** Astonishingly, in 1883 James did write a dramatized version with a happy Daisy-marries-Winterbourne ending. The up-and-coming young author was still finding his way, and the play flopped.

A second possibility is that James killed Daisy in order to assure his European friends — rather than his American readers — that he himself was "not like that",

i.e., not like Daisy. The idea that anyone might think that James was "like that", an uncultured *naif*, seems ludicrous, but really, you can never be too careful.

And finally, there is the obvious Am Lit 101 reason: Winterbourne and Daisy represent the two halves of James's psyche, and by killing off his original innocence he made possible the full flowering of his sophisticated and slightly decadent, yet stuffy, Winterbourne identity.

Was Oscar Wilde an American girl?

Daisy didn't care that people were talking about her, whereas for Wilde *the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.* Daisy and Wilde made a point of being cheeky to aunts (and the cheekiness of Victoria Dare, below, could have served as a model for Wilde), whereas Winterbourne *had imbibed in Geneva the idea that one must always be attentive to one's aunt*. Wilde was as little earnest as possible, whereas one of Winterbourne's auntly encumbrances, after having been rebuked for snubbing Daisy, declares *"In such a case, I don't wish to be clever, I wish to be* earnest*"*. Seventeen years before Oscar Wilde, Daisy was already him.

"But I don't believe it. They are only pretending to be shocked. They don't really care a straw what I do."

Neither Daisy nor Wilde really believed that earnestness (the miasma) would track them down and kill them. But it did. *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* Society must get its pound of flesh.

Exhibits

> *Within these bands of companions pleasure was pursued. The leader squandered his money, for he loved luxury, play, miming, horses, and dogs; morals were far from strict…. The pressures which forced twelfth-century knights, after they were dubbed, into a life of errancy must therefore be attributed to customs regulating the distribution of inheritances and of family wealth…. In fact, these adventures were also revealed as quests for wives perhaps first and foremost. Throughout their wanderings the bands of "youths" were animated by hopes of marriage. They knew that their leader, once himself settled, would consider it his first duty to marry off his companions. All* juvenes *were on the outlook for an heiress.*

Georges Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society". (Translation slightly adapted).

I have been frequently surprised, and almost frightened, at the singular address and happy boldness with which young women in America contrive to manage their thoughts and their language amidst all the difficulties of stimulating conversation; a philosopher would have stumbled at every step along the narrow path which they trod without accidents and without effort. It is easy indeed to perceive that, even amidst the independence of early youth, an American woman is always mistress of herself; she indulges in all permitted pleasures, without yielding herself up to any of them; and her reason never allows the reins of self-guidance to drop, though it often seems to hold them loosely.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1831.

In America, where young people flirt with incredible abandon, my action would have seemed completely natural; in France, where flirting has not yet spread in the social world, I was accused of playing with the pangs of love.

Arsène Houssaye, *Man About Paris, p. 113.*

One views with regret the pointless enslavement of that still childish being [Musset], always willing to be caught, subjected to the rude shocks of the heartless flirt who led him on.

Émile Henriot, Musset's biographer, speaking of Musset's failure to seduce Princess Belgiojoso. Elsewhere he called her "*a greenish-hued Milanese, a hard-hearted coquette, with nasty savage claws."*

Beth Archer Brombert, *Cristina: Portrait of a Princess,* p. 271; Charles Nelson Gattey, *A Bird of Curious Plumage,* p. 66.

"Flirting is a purely American custom; it doesn't exist here".

Winterbourne to Daisy

"There's a peculiar custom in this country – I shouldn't know he to express it in Genevese — it's called 'being attentive', and young girls are the object of the futile process. It hasn't necessarily anything to do with the projects of marriage – though it's the privilege only of the unmarried and though at the same time.... it has no relation to other projects. It's simply an arrangement by

which young persons of the two sexes pass large parts of their time together with no questions asked.

Cited from elsewhere in James in Virginia Fowler, *Henry James's American Girl,* p. 45.

"Flirting is to marriage what free trade is to commerce. By it the value of a woman is exhibited, tested, her capacities known, her temper displayed, and the opportunity offered of judging what sort of wife she may probably become".

Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, July 1860, cited in Daniel Mark Fogel, *Daisy Miller: A Dark Comedy of Manners*, p. 60.

The power of the woman in relation to the man is exhibited in consent ***or*** *refusal. It is precisely this antithesis — in which the conduct of the flirt alternates — that grounds the feeling of freedom, the independence of self from the one as well as the other, the autonomous existence that lies beyond the dominated oppositions. The power of the woman over consent and refusal is* ***prior*** *to the decision. Once she has decided, in either direction, her power is ended....*

Georg Simmel in "On Flirting" in *On Women, Sexuality, and Love.*

"The young ladies of this country have a dreadfully pokey time of it as far as I can learn".

Daisy Miller

Julia Marcou, whose father was French, told me that one of her friends in Paris who was just married told her of her excitement in going out alone for the first time and how frightened she was in finding that a gentleman was following her. As she approached her house, her terror increased lest she should meet her husband! for he would think that she had encouraged the man! She suddenly took out her purse, and handed the creature a penny whereupon he turned on his heel and she was saved from seeing her husband degrade himself. Julia told this as all quite natural. Surely there is an unbridgeable gulf betwixt the Northern man and he of the Latin races!

Alice James, *The Diary of Alice James*, p. 86.

That is to say, our behavior as a couple will be different, depending on whether we are in the presence of others. The distinction between these two types of conduct recreates, in a sense, the rigorous separation that exists in France between

the house and the street.... While the French couple must behave in a "decent" fashion in front of all those with whom one of the two has already established ties, they are not subjected to such severe restrictions in front of strangers.

> Raymonde Carroll, *Cultural Misunderstanding: The French-American Experience,* pp. 61-63.

What a noble river!" remarked Lord Dunbeg, as the boat passed out upon the wide stream; "I suppose you often sail on it?"

"I never was here in my life till now," replied the untruthful Miss Dare; "we don't think much of it; it's too small; we're used to so much larger rivers."

"I am afraid you would not like our English rivers then; they are mere brooks compared with this."

"Are they indeed?" said Victoria, with an appearance of vague surprise; "how curious! I don't think I care to be an Englishwoman then. I could not live without big rivers."

Lord Dunbeg stared, and hinted that this was almost unreasonable.

"Unless I were a Countess!" continued Victoria, meditatively, looking at Alexandria, and paying no attention to his lordship; "I think I could manage if I were a C-c-countess. It is such a pretty title!"

"Duchess is commonly thought a prettier one," stammered Dunbeg, much embarrassed. The young man was not used to chaff from women.

"I should be satisfied with Countess. It sounds well. I am surprised that you don't like it." Dunbeg looked about him uneasily for some means of escape but he was barred in. "I should think you would feel an awful responsibility in selecting a Countess. How do you do it?"

Lord Dunbeg nervously joined in the general laughter as Sybil ejaculated: "Oh, Victoria!" but Miss Dare continued without a smile or any elevation of her monotonous voice: "Now, Sybil, don't interrupt me, please. I am deeply interested in Lord Dunbeg's conversation. He understands that my interest is purely scientific, but my happiness requires that I should know how Countesses are selected. Lord Dunbeg, how would you recommend a friend to choose a Countess?"

Lord Dunbeg began to be amused by her impudence, and he even tried to lay down for her

satisfaction one or two rules for selecting Countesses, but long before he had invented his first rule, Victoria had darted off to a new subject.

"Which would you rather be, Lord Dunbeg? an Earl or George Washington?"

> Henry Adams, *Democracy: An American Novel,* Chapter VI. (Virginia Dare, literature's first American girl ™, lived under The Virgin Queen, whereas this one lives under Queen Victoria. Ha.)

"Who do you think is engaged? Victoria Dare, to a coronet and a peat-bog, with Lord Dunbeg attached. Victoria says she is happier than she ever was before in any of her other engagements, and she is sure this is the real one".

> Sybil Ross in *Democracy*

We know from Clover's letters that she had a falling out with Emily Beale [the free-spirited model for Victoria Dare in Henry Adams's *Democracy*], *whose wit and beauty Henry particularly enjoyed....*

> Kaledin, p. 183

I stoutly defended Henry James and Daisy Miller to stout Mrs. Smith in Chicago, and protested that the latter was charming, and that the author adored her.

> Mrs. Henry Adams (Clover Adams) in Kaledin's *Education of Mrs. Henry Adams*. However, Clover drew the line at Oscar Wilde, of whom she did not approve, and committed suicide at age 42.

Poor little D.M. was (as I understand her) in all things innocent.... *The whole idea of the story is the little tragedy of a light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed, as it were, to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head & to which she stood in no measurable relation.*

> Henry James to Eliza Linton, cited by Philip Horne in *Approaches to Teaching Henry James's Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw*, p. 52.

The physical intimacy this group shared even in social affairs must have created a good bit of sexual tension. Adams seems to have found the

idea of sexual competition exciting….Sexual morality was no more an issue for this circle of nineteenth century Americans than was political morality. Their repressions were so deep that they allowed platonic friendship to develop to an unreal, often extremely uncomfortable degree….The vision James reproduced in Daisy Miller *and* Portrait of a Lady *of the free-spirited American women intimate with men without any sexual involvement, if baffling to Europeans, seems nonetheless accurate among the innocents of his own social group….*

Kaledin, p. 183-4

At least it would have been thought that their prominent position in America would have saved women from the vice of husband-hunting, but the manner in which Miss Victoria Dare in "Democracy" pursues and captures Lord Dunbeg….. is not exactly maidenly.

"The Americans Painted by Themselves", in Peasant Properties, vol. 2, Frances Parthenope Verney (sister of Florence Nightingale), 1885.

C' etait une Américaine, libre comme l'Amérique, et blonde, mais blonde!....Intrépide et bête…. et

trop jolie pour elle, cette Yankee. C’était de la beauté perdue.

L’Américaine. (Tristan Corbiére).

There is also an American Girl ™ in Huysmans’ *Au Rebours*: "Miss Urania", a muscular, attractive, sexually willing, but unimaginative and unenthusiastic acrobat. And the one of the great loves of L.-F. Celine's life was a California Girl ™, a free-spirited dancer named Elizabeth Craig.

Your old-world reticence, your sense of decorum, may be shocked by the boldness of an American girl.

Charlotte Haze in *Lolita*

You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man.

Dolores Haze in *Lolita*

"Mr. Haze. You are an old-fashioned Continental father, aren’t you?”

“Why, no, “I said, “conservative, perhaps, but not what you would call old-fashioned.”

Humbert Humbert in *Lolita.*

Appendix I

Emily Beale / Victoria Dare

Emily Truxtun Beale, the model for Henry Adams's Victoria Dare, was a California girl, the great-granddaughter of Revolutionary War hero Thomas Truxton (a lodge fellow of Herman Melville's grandfather Peter Gansevoort, another Revolutionary war hero and Navy man); the daughter of Edward Fitzgerald Beale (a larger-than-life sailor, war hero, explorer, frontiersman, rancher, and public servant who blazed Route 66, experimented with raising camels in the Southwest, and served as the American ambassador to Austria-Hungary); and the sister of Truxton Beale, who played a role in more than one famous scandal.

Emily, a leading light of Washington society, was a friend both of Henry Adams and of Henry James (whose novels *America* and *Daisy Miller* were written at a time when she was close to both). She married John Roll McLean, former part-owner of the Cincinnati Reds (and briefly, a player on that team), who had just bought the *Washington Post*. Their son, Edward Beale McLean, took over the Post and ran it until 1933, by which time he was insane and the newspaper was bankrupt (to be sold for a song to the present ownership). Edward Beale McLean was close to the Harding Administration, lived lavishly,

raised race horses, and at one time owned the Hope Diamond, adding his own bit to the legend of the diamond's curse.

Emily has no biography, not even a Wiki page. She can't even be Googled easily because both her married name (Emily Beale McLean) and her maiden name (Emily Truxtun Beale) were used in the family generation after generation. Get on it, people!

> **Note**: Literature's first California girl ™ is said to have been Molly Wopsus in Joaquin Miller's *One Fair Woman.* And then there's Gertrude Stein, who along with Winnaretta Singer was one of the great lesbians of Paris.

Appendix II

American girl Daisy Fellowes (b. 1890)

This Daisy was an author, Satie's favorite *danceuse,* a patron of Elsa Schiaparelli and of the arts, the mother of three princesses, the granddaughter of Isaac Merritt Singer (the supposed inventor of the sewing machine), the daughter of Isabelle-Blanche Singer and Jean Élie Octave Louis Sévère Amanieu Decazes, 3rd Duke of Decazes and Glücksberg, and the niece and ward of Princess de Polignac (the former Princess de Scey-Montbéliard, née Winnaretta Singer). By her first marriage to Jean Amédée Marie Anatole de Broglie,

Daisy was the cousin-in-law of Nobel laureate Louis Victor Pierre Raymond, 7th duc de Broglie, and by her second marriage the cousin-in-law of Winston Churchill (whom she reportedly attempted to seduce).

Daisy Fellowes's maiden name was Marguerite Séverine Philippine Decazes de Glücksberg. "Marguerite" is the French word for "daisy". The Singer girls, including Daisy's mother, had to have been familiar with *Daisy Miller* (Henry James's only popular success), so Princess Marguerite's given name could not have been an accident.

Appendix III
Pushing up daisies

> *Winterbourne took it in; he stood staring at the raw protuberance among the April daisies.*
>
> *Daisy Miller* (ending).

James was a sucker for hidden puns: here, "pushing up daisies". But there is an even subtler play on Daisy's name in his book, one involving both Victor Hugo and Nathanael Hawthorne.

As we saw above, the French word for "daisy" (the flower) is "*margeurite*". In Latin and in Old French "*margeurite / margarita*" also means "pearl", as Victor

Hugo noted. In *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1833) Hugo punningly cites the Biblical *Margaritas ante porcos* "pearls before swine", and decades later in *Les Miserables* (1862) this rare usage is seen again: *"O Fantine, maid worthy of being called Margeurite or Pearl, you are a woman from the beauteous Orient"*.

Since during the 19th c. everyone had read Hugo, for better or for worse, we may safely assume that James's lovely innocent Daisy / Margeurite is a version of Hugo's Fantine / Margeurite / Pearl (a lovely innocent, born in sin) and that by making this identification James subtly evokes Hester Prynne's daughter Pearl, the lovely innocent born in sin in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter.* Pearl, like Daisy and Victoria Dare an American Girl, is not tormented and imprisoned like Fantine, or hanged by the neck until dead like the innocent-born-in-sin Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (and may I add, my guilty eight-times-great aunt Elizabeth Emerson). Instead (in accordance with American tradition) she just collects her inheritance / dowry and goes off to Europe to marry a prince.

In the Anglophone world, the lovely innocents hanged by the neck until dead were Billy Budd and Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The almost-simultaneous publication of these two books around 1890 must have been due to some dramatic hanging of innocents during

the immediate preceding period (perhaps the 1888 hangings of the Haymarket anarchists). I have found no confirmation of that, however, and (as I explain below) Melville's story can also be traced back to an event in the life of his cousin Guert Gansvoort, but given Hugo's pervasive influence I think that it is reasonable to suspect that that Tess and Billy were also versions of Esmeralda.

Appendix IV
The French Girl

I have used France as my European point of reference even though *Daisy Miller* takes place in Switzerland and Italy. The book isn't really about Switzerland or Italy at all, except insofar as they are satellites of France (with Geneva also standing in for the Puritans) -- treating Italians like human beings is one of the sins of the Miller family. This is a book about cultural tourism, and in the 19th century all roads led to Paris. London, Vienna, Berlin, etc., were also attractors, but people from these cities went to Paris. Geneva and Italy were places the French went to when they wanted to be tourists themselves, and the Americans in *Daisy Miller* are tagging along after them. (French tourists looking for real action went to North Africa, Turkey, and Egypt, but those places were too kinky for Americans).

George Sand, Princess Cristina Belgiojoso, Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, Judith Gautier, and

Flaubert’s niece and ward Caroline (Fleuriot) Commanville were among the classiest and most privileged women in France. All of them were abused by swinish husbands. All except for Belgiojoso and Sand had an verifiably pokey time of it, and these women were much luckier than the typical respectable Frenchwoman of that era.

As for the courtesans, though they had fun while it lasted, most of them came to a bad end — either a lonely and impoverished old age, or early death from the tuberculosis that made them so fetching. One exception was the monster La Païva, who left us a Parisian architectural monument to remember her by (and like Victoria Dare and Hawthorne's Pearl, died a Countess).

The sexy reputation of the French has allowed the world to ignore the dreariness the respectable woman's life. Freedom was only for men and whores. A nice girl would be kept in purdah, doing embroidery all day long and occasionally meeting select young men in controlled circumstances, until finally she was married off to a man acceptable to her older relatives.

The relative lack of pokiness in the life of American girls was made possible by the fact that a young American woman could to be trusted to flirt with men, or even to spend time alone in a room with one without having sex. Not everyone is sure that this was a

good thing. Some felt that when the French girl's time came around and she finally succeeded in escaping from custody, she was far more enthusiastic than the self-controlled American girl.

Appendix V: Princess Belgiojoso

Brombert, Beth Archer,
Cristina: Portrait of a Princess.

Princess Cristina Belgiojoso ("born an exception") was a wealthy northern Italian noblewoman and patriot (from an Austrian-ruled area) whose family had Bonapartist connections. She was married off young to an abusive aristocratic dandy who (since their money was hers) she was able to pension off after he had given her syphilis, and with whom she had almost no later contact. She was extraordinarily beautiful (though some of the men she rejected came to deny this) and around 1830 every man in Paris was after her, from Lafayette (then in his sixties) to Musset. While she was friendly to all (hence the accusations of being a flirt) she was interested in none, preferring to live a solitary life as a scholar and author. (She did have one child, generally assumed to have been the product of a secret relationship with a well-known historian, the rather stodgy François Mignet. According to Brombert, the daughter seems rather remarkably to have somehow contracted a happy

marriage). Several of Christina's own books can still be found, and her report on the unsuccessful 1848 revolution in Italy, in which she had participated, is still an important source.

During that revolution she organized the nurses in a war hospital (many of them prostitutes) with the help of the famous New England author Margaret Fuller. In the elite 19th century world everyone was connected to everyone else. When Henry James was writing his biography of the American expat sculptor William Wetmore Story he came to know of Belgiojoso’s connection with Fuller, a friend of Story’s, and she has thus been suggested as the model for James's Princess Casamassima. Many also have thought that Belgiojoso was the model for Duchess Sanseverina in Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). Stendhal had met the princess but denied that she was beautiful (perhaps because she had rejected him along with the others); she in turn, after reading the novel, reported that she did not recognize herself in the Duchess.

Like Daisy, Princess Cristina found the Franks of her time to be excessively formal.

Appendix VI: Princess Mathilde

Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, Napoleon's niece, Napoleon III's cousin, and a cousin of the Czar into the bargain, illustrates the constricted life of even the most privileged and freest of the respectable women of that time.

From an early age she was aware of the way that women were excluded from much of life:

> "*A sister – what's an unmarried sister? It's less than nothing, it only dreams about dresses, you can't reason with it, and above all it can't talk about horses and railways, which are inexhaustible topics for the young man in fashion*"
>
> Joanna Richardson, *Princess Mathilde*, p. 33 (speaking of her elder brother Jerome).

Mathilde's salon attracted the most talented men in Paris, and she was a generous patron of the arts. However, after every gathering of hers the men adjourned to a second and less respectable location, sometimes a restaurant and sometimes a whorehouse, and to these she (as a woman) was explicitly not invited. In her comments on this she might be thought to be objecting snobbishly or puritanically to the nature of the women these men chose to frolic with; but she could

equally well have been objecting to the fact that, as a dowried Princess, she was excluded from categories of fun dear to her friends, who were mostly men:

> *Yesterday the Princess gave Flaubert a terrible wigging on account of his visits to la Tourbey. Speaking with all the pride of a princess and a woman of society, she complained this morning, with a certain wittiness, that it was with women of that sort that she had to share the company and thoughts of her friends, of men like Taine, Renan, and Saint-Beuve, who, when dining with he, would steal twenty minutes of her time and present them to that trollop. She went on to protest at the dominion enjoyed by these women, honored by the company of philosophers, men of letters, scientists, and thinkers; and at the power wielded by these sluts....*

Goncourts, p. 140.

Her disapproving attitude with regard to these women can be interpreted somewhat differently as her resentment at missing out on the fun: they had places to go to to let loose, but as a woman, she didn't.

> *She had also asked Saint-Beuve if she might attend the Magny dinners. These fortnightly Monday dinners had begun the previous November at the restaurant Magny in the rue, Contrescarpe-*

> *Dauphine, and they drew a constellation of artists and intellectuals. Saint-Beuve was disconcerted by Mathilde's request – perhaps the presence of a woman, an imperial Highness, would change the nature of the gatherings. ' Mathilde recognized that she had gone too far. 'I saw by your expression that you were doubtful,' she confessed. "You're right, I suppose I must be content with being nice to these gentlemen in my own house, though I cramp their style rather more than it's cramped at Magny's*".

Richardson, *Mathilde*, pp. 107-108.

Mathilde had a husband in Russia from whom she had been rescued by her cousin the Czar, plus an official lover who did not treat her terribly well though he essentially owed his his high position to her. These attachments made her "safe", like Apollonie Sabatier, and respectable men could attend her salon without fear of scandal, but they meant that she would be left out of the fun. Flaubert reportedly came close to freeing her from her dungeon, but at the last minute he became tongue-tied:

> [Princess Mathilde said] *'Well? What have you got to tell me that's so confidential and urgent? We're alone, as we asked, and I'm perfectly ready to listen.....' Imagine her surprise when she saw him*

turn very red and then very pale. The most diverse expressions crossed his face: fear, anguish, terror, despair.... he stammered some incoherent sounds, then he rose precipitately, made for the door and ran....On 20 February 1865, in an autograph album, Flaubert wrote: "Women will never know how timid men are".

Richardson, *Mathilde*, pp. 166-7. (Reported by Gege Primoli, Mathilde's *young cousin.)*

Appendix VII
"How cool is *that*?"

But there's Giovanelli, leaning against that tree. He's staring at the women in the carriages: did you ever see anything so cool?

…..

But did you ever see anything so cool as Mr. Walker's wanting me to get into her carriage and drop poor Mr. Giovannelli; and under the pretext that it was proper? People have different ideas! That would have been most unkind; he had been talking about that walk for days.

Appendix VIII
The word "flirt" (Google Ngram)

Daisy Miller was published in 1878, and Houssaye's book above was published in 1885. The

incidence of the word “flirt” in American or British English was fairly stable between 1880 and 1895, ranging from .00006% to .0001%, but during that period the word “flirt” became ten times more frequent in French, its incidence rising from 0.0000025% to 0.00003% (although by 1895 this foreign word was still only a third as common in French as in English). One must assume that around this time American girls taught the French how to flirt (starting with the unfortunate Arsène Houssaye), thus making the lives of the French girls significantly less pokey, and *Frankenreich* itself a less dreadfully Puritanical place.

Appendix IX
Plasmodium falciparum

The *Plasmodium* parasite which causes malaria was endemic in Italy from classical times until it was eradicated by the fascists during the 1930s. *P. falciparum,* the most deadly of the five plasmodium species, is the only one that can cause sudden death (as in Daisy’s case). The *plasmodium parasites* are all spread by mosquitoes, but that was not known at the time that James wrote his book -- "malaria” is just Italian for “bad air”, i.e., "villainous miasma".

Appendix X
The Lacanian View

It seems that when Daisy failed to put out for the dark Italian that summer, it meant that she was and would forever remain uncultured, sexless, and not fully human. Beyond this, her ruination was a portent of the collapse of civilization. Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina and various other novelistic females became whole persons by unreservedly accepting their womanhood, but Daisy refused to do so and would have ended her life as a stunted, horrible half-person if the *p. falciparum ex machina* hadn't saved her.

> *"[James] writes of the American woman that "the conditions of American life in general, and our great scheme of social equality in particular, have done many things for her and have left many other things undone; but they have above all secured for her the primary benefit that she is the woman in the world who is least afraid." Her total lack of fear became for her, moreover, "her one great sign", the sign by which Europe "knew her". Yet this sign, James argues, ultimately portend the doom of civilization (p.* 39).
>
> *Many of the American girls, like Daisy Miller, remain unawakened by the European experience, and consequently unaware of their sexuality* (p.

44) .... *some of the American girls .... are truly "slim" and "sexless". They have been unnaturally encouraged by the conditions of American life that produced them to remain in a state of perpetual girlhood. Their inability to perceive their own sexuality can lead, as James suggests in the case of Daisy Miller, to their destruction on the human stage* (p.46)…. *If the American girl's sexlessness makes it possible for the American man to idealize her as the essence of innocence and moral value…. it also reflects the inability of the girl herself to become fully human* (p. 47).

Henry James's American Girl, Virginia Fowler.

Appendix XI
Suggestions for further study

1. Mark Twain, Innocents Abroad (1869), the source of the "American innocent" meme, presumably.

2. The miasma lives on. The below (unknown author) was written fairly recently.

[Daisy] may be open and straightforward, but she is also immature, superficial, and inconsiderate. Her affronting the expatriate community is foolhardy and goes too far. She will not admit that

> *the individual freedom of decision may be impeded by the necessity to adapt oneself to conventions…… She ignores the advice, and when she goes to the Capitol at night, the bad airs take their effect. Daisy catches the Roman fever and dies within a week.*
>
> *http://angam.ang.univie.ac.at/k525ss00/Vo3005.htm*

3. Daisy Buchanan (*The Great Gatsby,* 1925). Innocence / corruption, etc., etc. Tom and Daisy as the perfect image of the dominant American class.

4. Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever" (1934). Wharton's heroine gets away with it, but she follows the protocols.

5. Kathy Kohner Zuckerman, the real-life model for the archetypal California girl ™ / surfer girl Gidget, was (like Arnold Schoenberg and Ludwig von Mises) an Austro-Hungarian Jew.

Ressentiment and Schooling

Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

William Shakespeare, "The Ages of Man"

Friedrich Nietzsche, a philologist by trade, testified to the importance of the study of Latin and of Latin rhetoric:

> *Of all the things the German academic high school did, the most valuable was its training in Latin style, for this was an artistic exercise, while all the other activities were aimed solely at knowledge. To put the German essay first is barbarism, for we have no classical German style developed by a tradition of public eloquence; but if one wants to use the German essay to further the practice of thinking, it is certainly better if one ignores the style entirely for the time being, thus distinguishing exercise in thinking and in describing. The latter should be concerned with multiple versions of a single content, and not with independent invention of content. Description only, with the content given, was the assignment of Latin style, for which the old teachers possessed a long-since-lost refinement of hearing. Anyone who*

in the past learned to write well in a modern language owed it to this exercise, (now one is obliged to go to school under the older French teachers); and still further: he gained a concept of the majesty and difficulty of form, and was prepared for are in general in the only possible right way: through practice."

"One vanished preparation for art", #203 in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, vol. I.

I think that extensive drill in the imitation of the virtuoso Latin authors probably does account for the extraordinary subtlety, quickness and vigor of Nietzsche's writing. Another nineteenth-century author of similar education was the poet Arthur Rimbaud, Nietzsche's younger French contemporary, who was a student of one of those "older French teachers" and won a prize when he was twelve for a Latin poem (complete with *epanalepsis* and *anantapodoton*) on an obscure set theme (Jugartha, the Numidian enemy of Rome):

....ascitur Arabiis ingens in collibus infans
Et dixit levis aura: "Nepos est ille Jugartha! (etc.)

Nietszche's and Rimbaud's virtuosity as writers made it possible for them to write things that they could not have said using a more straightforward style. Both had the power to say many things at once, including

contrary things, without losing the thread. Indeed, Rimbaud’s “derèglement de tous les sens”, whatever else it may have been, was a new rhetoric, and some of the *Illuminations* can be seen as simple exercises in a new way of putting words together -- as if the nominally meaningful content in a virtuoso piece on some Jugartha had been replaced with words more associable with Rimbaud's actual obsessions:

H

> *Toutes les monstruosités violent les gestes atroces d'Hortense. Sa solitude est la mécanique érotique, sa lassitude, la dynamique amoureuse. Sous la surveillance d'une enfance elle a été, à des époques nombreuses, l'ardente hygiène des races. Sa porte est ouverte à la misère. Là: la moralité des êtres actuels se décorpore en sa passion ou en son action. - Ô terrible frisson des amours novices sur le sol sanglant et par l'hydrogène clarteux ! trouvez Hortense.*[1]

> All the monstrosities invade the horrible movements of Hortense. Her solitude is a erotic mechanics; her weariness, an amorous dynamic. Under the watch of childhood she has been, at various times, the blazing hygiene of the races. Her door opens on squalor. There the morality of present beings disembodies into her passion

or her action. - Oh terrible shudder of novice love, against a bloody ground and hydrogen-illumined! find Hortense.

Unlike Nietzsche, Rimbaud (whose harsh mother monitored his studies closely and demanded extraordinary efforts) hated Latin from the first:

"In spite of all this, my father sent me to school when I was ten. "Why", I would say to myself, "learn Greek and Latin? I don't know! There's no need of it, anyway! What does it matter to me if I pass my exams? What's the use of passing one's exams? It is of no use at all, is it? Yes it is, though: they say there is no employment without a pass....Then take history: learning the lives of Chinaldon, and Nabopolassar, of Darius, of Cyrus, and of Alexander, and of their cronies, outstanding for their diabolical names (remarquables par leurs noms diaboliques) is a torture. What does it matter to me that Alexander was famous? What does it matter?.....How does anyone know that the Latins ever existed? Perhaps their Latin is some counterfeit language....What evil have I done that they should put me to the torture?"

"*Le soleil etait encore chaude....", Collected Poems,* tr. Bernard, written in 1864 when Rimbaud was ten years old.

> *Sometimes* [Rimbaud's mother] *would send them to bed supperless because they had been unable to recite, without a slip, the hundreds of Latin verses she had set them to learn from memory*).
>
> Bernard, "Introduction", p. xxix.

Rimbaud had ample precedent for his resentment, which is intrinsic to schooling itself. The great church father St. Augustine, for example, had been forced into the study of rhetoric by his ambitious parents:

> *I was too small to understand what purpose it might serve and yet, if I was idle at my studies, I was beaten for it, because beating was favored by tradition. Countless boys long forgotten had built up this stony path for us to tread and we were made to pass along it, adding to the toil and sorrow of the sons of Adam.....*
>
> *I was still a boy when I began to pray to you, my Help and Refuge. I used to prattle away to you, and though I was small, my devotion was great when I begged you not to let me be beaten at school. ....*
>
> *Oh Lord....O Lord, throughout the world men beseech you to preserve them from the rack and*

the hook and various similar torture which terrify them. Some people are merely callous, but if a man clings to you with great devotion, how can his piety to inspire him to make light of these tortures, when he loves those who dread them so fearfully? And yet this is how our parents scoffed at the torments which we boys suffered at the hands of our masters. For we feared the whip just as much as other feared the rack, and we, no less than they, begged you to preserve us from it. But we sinned by reading and writing less than was expected of us.

St. Augustine, Confessions, Book I, #9, p. 30.

If this was so, why did I dislike Greek literature, which tells us these tales, as much as the Greek language itself?.... I suppose that Greek boys think the same about Virgil when they are forced to study him as I felt about Homer.... For I understood not a single word and I was constantly subjected to violent threats and cruel punishments to make me learn..... This clearly shows that we learn better in a free spirit of curiosity than under fear and compulsion. But your law, O God, permits the free flow of curiosity to be stemmed by force. From the schoolmaster's cane to the ordeal of martyrdom, your law prescribes bitter medicine to retrieve us

from the noxious pleasures which cause us to desert you.

Book I, #9, p. 35.

In Augustine's case, as in Nietzsche's and Rimbaud's, the child was, to his own detriment, made the standard-bearer for the worldly ambitions of a pious and respectable, but marginal and (roughly) petty-bourgeois family, and Rimbaud's triumphant rhetorical set-piece on Jugartha had been preceded a millennium and a half earlier by Augustine's prize-winning but meaningless "speech of Juno" (Book I, #17, p. 37). Even as a Saint, Augustine remained bitter:

And yet human children are pitched into this hellish torrent, together with the fees that are paid to have them taught lessons like these. Much business is at stake, too, when these matters are publicly debated, because the law decrees that teachers should be paid a salary in addition to the fees paid by their pupils. And the roar of the torrent beating upon its boulders seems to say: This is the school where men are made masters of words. This is where they learn the art of persuasion, so necessary in business and debate....

Book I, #16, p.36.

Kenneth Rexroth has argued that St. Augustine invented the Oedipus Complex and was responsible for the sexual guilt which he thought characteristic of Western civilization:

> *There is ample evidence that Western European civilization is specifically the culture of the Oedipus Complex. Before Augustine there was nothing really like it. There were forerunners and prototypes and intimations, but there wasn't the real thing. The Confessions introduce a new sickness of the human mind, the most horrible pandemic, and the most lethal, ever to afflict man. Augustine did what silly literary boys in our day boast of doing. He invented a new derangement.*
>
> "Introduction" to D.H. Lawrence's *Selected Poems*

Augustine's feelings of personal guilt and the resultant doctrine of original sin are often traced back to his loathing of the body and uneasiness with sex. The truth seems to be otherwise, however. According to the evidence he gives, during his serious relationship young Augustine was enthusiastic, affectionate, and faithful. His guilt was due to the fact that his long-term relationship was an unmarried one, and this was because a marriage would have interfered with the worldly ambitions of his parents -- including his pious mother:

My family made no effort to save me from my fall by marriage. Their only concern was that I should learn how to make a good speech and how to persuade others by my words.....For even my mother, who by now had escaped from the center of Babylon, though she still loitered in its outskirts, did not act upon what she had heard from her husband with the same earnestness as she had advised me about chastity. She saw that I was already infected with a disease that would become dangerous later on, but if the growth of my passions could not be cut back to the quick, she did not think it right to restrict it to the bonds of married love. This was because she was afraid that the bonds of marriage might be a hindrance to my hopes for the future – not of course the hope of the life to come, but my hopes of success at my studies. Both my parents were unduly eager for me to learn, my father because he gave no thought to you and only shallow thought to me, and my mother because she thought that the usual course of study would certainly not hinder me, but even would help me, in my approach to you.

Book II, #3, pp. 42-46).

Augustine only begins to mention sexual temptation and his rather minor Oedipal problems in

Book II. Book I is dominated by his resentment of his teacher, who sometimes resembles an angry God and sometimes a cruel demon. Augustine's feelings in Book I are a confused mess: resentment of the punitive teacher; partly-sublimated resentment at his parents for having forced him into this "martyrdom" (his comparison); guilt at his mild and childish disobedience (a guilt which seems to derive from the shame of physical punishment); and Christian objections to the pagan and worldly content of the teachings in the school. In the end his renunciation liberates him, not really from The Father, but from the teachers:

> *The schoolteachers need not exclaim at my words, for I no longer go in fear of them now that I confess my soul's desires to you, my lord.*
>
> Book I, #13, p. 34.

So here we have a new theory of Western Civilization, which is based not on sexual repression per se, but on educational practices which, in the interest of their parents' ambitions, consign small, helpless children from middling families to the hands of brutal teachers, forbidding them to marry or to have fun until they have achieved success and can find a properly respectable match -- at best, in early middle age. In the cases here the "family" consists of a strong mother and an absent or ineffectual father -- and it is precisely the father's failure

to properly establish the family that imposes the terrible obligation on the poor child. (In Augustine's case, as Bartin and Brown show, in the decaying and deflated Roman Empire almost no one could afford a respectable marriage, with the result that "lewdness" was rife.)

It was the resentment felt against ambitious mothers who forced their sons to study Latin or Greek instead of marrying which led to the resentment, decadent practices, heterodox views, and brilliant writing which have been the driving force of Western history. Augustine was only the beginning of a long tradition. During his Manichaean period before the reconversion to Christianity, he had in fact been a member of a decadent avant-garde group called "The Wreckers" (Book 3, #3, p. 58), and this move from decadence to piety was later matched by Dante, Huysmans, and many others.

Conclusion

In the history of civilization Rimbaud and Nietzsche are counted among the rebels, naysayers, and immoralists, whereas Augustine was a founder of Christian orthodoxy. But they are all men of the same type, angry men who, for reasons of family ambition, had been forced against their will into intense programs of study which, in return, allowed them to express their resentment with supreme eloquence and

persuasiveness. Augustine seems different because over the course of the centuries, his eloquence has persuaded almost everyone, notably the mothers of Nietzsche and Rimbaud. But prophets are always fated to have their words misinterpreted, and a key part of his message has been forgotten: his hatred of his education.

Note

1. Hortense in Rimbaud's "H" is presumably Hortense de Beauharnais, Napoleon III's mother, Napoleon I's stepdaughter and sister-in-law, Morny's mother, and Queen of Holland. The Communard Rimbaud hated Napoleon III, and here he is ever so eloquently talking shit about his mom. The one-letter title is probably a parody of the contemporary practice of avoiding the use of full names for fear of a lawsuit or duel -- a practice which Rimbaud cheerfully violates at the end of the poem.

The Bonapartes make a joke of the ideologies of hereditary rule. Descended from an uncultivated commoner family in the most backward (and least French) province of France, they inherited no ancient lands or titles, and in 1815 they lost everything that Napoleon had gained for them. But most of the second generation of Bonapartes were cousins of the crowned heads of Europe, and Napoleon I's own upstart prestige still lingered, so the Bonapartes couldn't just be ignored.

The Bonapartes didn't put undue emphasis on the proprieties. Princess Mathilde reports on her Murat cousins (Bonapartes on their mother's side):

> *She went on to talk about the Murats, the whole family sleeping together pell-mell. "They were just like rabbits", she said. "Anna [Duchesse de Mouchy], at the age of ten, was always in her nightdress. I had all the trouble in the world to keep her from kissing one of the valets. [Prince] Joachim, when he was a child, used to smoke the coachman's pipe. As for the other girl, Caroline, Madame de Chassiron, it was impossible to wash her feet."*
>
> Goncourts, pp. 139-140.

Topics for Future Study

A.

Henry David Thoreau, "the finest American classicist of his century". His ambitious mother, his ineffectual father, and his failed love affair.

B.

The significant sisters of Rimbaud, St. Augustine, Thoreau, Nietzsche and Pascal. The role of the parents in

Sartre’s *Les Mots*: did Sartre study Latin? Pascal’s mother. Nietzsche’s apparent lack of early resentment of his forced studies: was he in denial or repressed ?

> *"I did far too much when I was young" he sometimes said to me. "As a student I sometimes studied all night, I always had a bucket of cold water under the table; if I noticed that I wanted to fall asleep, I put my feet in it, and then I felt fresh again...."*

> Eugenie Gallie, quoting one of Nietzsche's landlords, in Sander Gilman, *Conversations with Nietzsche*, p. 171.

C.

The classicists of the early modern age (Montaigne, Rabelais, More, Erasmus). Their attitudes respectively toward Latin and Greek -- the opposite of Augustine's. They hated Latin scholastic theology but loved Greek, whereas in his youth St. Augustine had delighted in immoral pagan tales in Latin, his native language, but hated Homeric Greek. (In Charlemagne’s court Alcuin grumbled about the novice monks continuing to recite pagan sagas).

D.

Classicist education was forced on helpless boys in traditional China too. Why did China not also become a culture of *ressentiment*?

E.

God and grammar:

> *O Lord my God, be patient, as you always are, with the men of this world as you watch them and see how strictly they obey the rules of grammar which have been handed down to them, and yet ignore the eternal rules of everlasting salvation which they have received from you.*
>
> Augustine, Book I, #18, p. 39
>
> *I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.*
>
> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Kaufman's translation.
>
> *What I want to stress here is a special correspondence between the emergence of selfhood understood as a person and the emergence of "the" text from the page.*
>
> Ivan Illych, *In the Vineyard of the Text*

F.

We like to attribute shameful deaths to grudgingly-admired authors who were too weird for us, and clio-diagnosis is perhaps the evilest area of literary studies. We know now that Nietzsche did not die of syphilis and was probably not syphilitic at all, that Poe died of rabies from a dog bite and may not have been an alcoholic at all, and that whether or not Baudelaire had syphilis, he died from the effects of a stroke, as did his mother a few years later. More examples could easily be found.

Further reading

Bartin, Carlin, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, Princeton, 1993.

Brown, Peter, *The World of Late Antiquity*, Norton, 1971.

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage, 1980.

Could Friedrich Nietzsche have married Jane Austen?

In their different ways, Austen and Nietzsche were both obsessed with manners and breeding, and women who met Nietzsche found him to be pleasant, courtly and reserved, rather like the Darcy type favored by Austen in her novels. And while it is generally wrong to identify authors with characters in their novels, I think that it is reasonable to hypothesize that the ideal matches described in Austen's novels tell us something about Austen's own taste in men. And so we are impelled to ask: *cambiat cambiatum* and *per impossibile*, could Jane Austen have married Nietzsche?

Nietzsche was the most brilliant German classicist of his generation and became a full professor younger than anyone ever had before. His family was completely respectable, but his mother was widowed and far from wealthy, and since academics were not well paid he was not especially marriageable – certainly not after his retirement with a disability. His relationships with women were few and unsuccessful, apparently being limited to infatuations with the wives of friends and a conjectured encounter with a prostitute. On the other hand, women who met him testified that he was by no means unattractive – "not like a professor", as one explained.

Nietzsche is often enough treated as a sexless object of ridicule, but his sexual problems were mostly situational.

Nietzsche had always been a good boy, and during the bourgeois 19th c., the expectations of well-born good boys were enormous, especially in Lutheran Germany: chaste and decent behavior, strict respect for propriety and good manners, educational and professional accomplishments, deference to superiors, adherence to an ethicized Prussian-Kantian version of Lutheran modernist orthodoxy which emphasized Duty above all else, and beyond these traditional demands there were also pressures to participate in the new technocratic, capitalist nationalism . Nietzsche rejected some of the traditional demands -- primarily in religion and ethics -- but not all of them, and he lived an essentially conventional life. He rejected utilitarianism and the bourgeois work ethic in favor of the more heroic aristocratic ideal, and in theory at least he rejected Lutheran moralism for the more erotic way of life of the aristocracy.

Democratic ideology tends to misrepresent aristocrats as effete and sissified, but while the ideal nobleman was elegant and fully eroticized, he was a brutish military specialist nonetheless. Nietzsche used an ideal aristocrat as one of the models for his Superman, though he fully realized that actual aristocracies did not conform to his ideal and that he himself would not have

been viable either among the existing aristocracy or in the ideal world he imagined. What he especially retained from his heritage was an extreme emphasis on distinction, refinement, superiority, and self-improvement.

Let us take Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), for example, as a case study in the life of an actual aristocracy. Austen's book describes the lifeboat ethics of the children of the lower English gentry doomed by demographics to net downward mobility. Elegant, pious propriety masked the use of every means necessary to destroy rivals for favorable marriages and inheritances – rivals who were often very near kin. In Austen's book, as in French realist fiction, the people are epiphenomenal, with the real players being the titles to parcels of landed property.

Class systems which make culture and refinement possible by concentrating wealth also produce as by-products cultured people of uncertain status who would have to be forgotten and ejected, perhaps to the colonies, while at the same time dooming the majority of their still-respectable members to conventional and generally unhappy marriages. A good marriage partner had to be of good family with an adequate income, should be reasonably well-bred and personable, should belong to the right religious denomination and political faction, and should belong to approximately the same

social circle (“cousins or something like it”.) Any personal requirements imposed by the individual partners beyond these would further restrict the pool of eligibles, often to the vanishing point, and marriages were often arranged in complete disregard for the desires of the nominal principals.

The aristocrats in Austen’s book were not supermen or anything like supermen. Traditional aristocrats were not answerable to anyone, and having fun was a big part of their job. Austen's gentry did not aspire to self-overcoming, but were perfectly happy to occupy themselves with hunting, whist, hot toddies, dances, flirtation, and seduction. While Nietzsche envied the amoral ease and grace of the aristocracy, as a self-confessed decadent (i.e., as a bourgeois modern Lutheran) he did not hope to attain it, especially insofar as in the actual aristocracy it was often linked with stupidity and laziness. It was for this reason that he had to invent a new, strenuous, rigorous ideal even more difficult than the conventional life he had been born into. The self-overcoming Superman was a hyper-bourgeois hyper-Lutheran slave to Duty, an intensified, impossible replacement for the already absurdly-high Lutheran standard. In the end Nietzsche, instead of making life easier and more fun, chose to make it even more difficult.

But back to the main question: if Nietzsche had been an Austen character, could he have married one of Austen's Dashwood sisters? As we have seen, the answer is almost certainly "No". In his favor is Jane Austen’s authorial preference for reserved, dignified suitors. When she concocted improbably happy endings for her books, Austen made sure that the nice guy got the girl, with the dashing, impulsive cad slinking offstage in disgrace. While Nietzsche in person was quite impressive (see below) and much like the characters Austen favored, Austen's characters also expected an annual income of a st least a thousand pounds. (For context, the annual subsistence income for a laborer at that time was less than 50 pounds, while D'Arcy's income has been estimated at twenty thousand). So Nietzsche would have been out of luck. But then one might additionally ask: if a Nietzsche *with adequate means* had succeeded in marrying Jane Austen, how would things have turned out?

Badly, one assumes. Austen was hardly the kind of feminist Nietzsche feared so intensely, but one doubts that he could have been a supportive husband for any woman of talent. A married, less tightly-wound Nietzsche might have lost his desperate megalomaniacal edge while still being a great writer and philosopher, and that would certainly have made the world a better place, but would anyone really be willing to sacrifice Austen's novels for that? Shame on you for even thinking that way!

Appendix:
First person reports on Nietzsche

Below are contemporary descriptions of Nietzsche, more than half by women. Let the reader judge whether he's a Darcy. I think that these descriptions should lay to rest the common belief that Nietzsche was a pitiful, neurotic bookworm with delusions of grandeur -- three of the authors specifically note that he had a fine presence and didn't seem like a typical German professor at all. (From *Conversations with Nietzsche*, ed. Sander Gilman, Oxford, 1987.)

Sebastian Hausman:

This is absolutely not the impression I had got on meeting Nietzsche; on the contrary, I found him extraordinarily fresh and lively.... (p. 139).

[He] spoke with me in such a friendly, amiable manner [that] he gave me the impression that at the bottom of his soul he must have been an unusually kind and loving person (p. 140).

Meta von Salis-Marschlins:

Even the first impression was comparable with no other. The strangeness and un-Germanness of his face matched his unassuming behavior, which gave

no clue to his being a German professor. A strong self-confidence made any posturing superfluous.(p. 159).

Helen Zimmern:

[One] immediately became aware of being in the presence of a man who was completely conscious of his value....Not only was there no sign of insanity detectable in him, but he was not even eccentric.... (p. 167) I also know what Nietzsche wrote about women. But according to my experiences I can only say that Nietzsche was always of the most perfect gentilezza....(p. 168).

Adolf Ruthardt:

Nietzsche's external appearance made an extremely agreeable impression on me. Above middle height, slender, well-formed, with an erect but not stiff stance, his gestures harmonious, calm, and sparing..... [this] allowed him so little to resemble the type of a German scholar that he called to mind a Southern French nobleman or an Italian or Spanish higher officer in civilian clothes.... (p. 183).

Marie von Bradke:

The man walking there, I noted clearly, had an artist's eyes and bore high, lonesome, unique thoughts into his experience of nature's beauty. When one saw the great, strong, well-dressed figure with the full, rosy face and the mustache, hastening along so, one would have taken him for a Junker [landed nobleman] *rather than a scholar or an artist* (p. 190).

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John Stuart Mill
und die ewige Wiederkehr

And it is very characteristic both of my then state, and of the general tone of my mind at this period of my life, that I was seriously tormented by the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations. The octave consists only of five tones and two semi-tones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small proportion are beautiful: most of these, it seemed to me, must have been already discovered, and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out, as these had done, entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty....

John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (1873),
Part V, "A crisis in my mental history"

Further Annotations to Nabokov *and Appel's Annotated Lolita*

I wish that Appel had asked Nabokov about Henry James's *Daisy Miller* and Chodorlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. For all their differences, Daisy Miller and Dolores Haze are classic American Girls™, born 70 years (and not many miles) apart. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* the innocent 14 year old convent girl Cécile Volanges is seduced (by an evil seducer, of course) but ends up liking it and wearing out the seducer, though of course her life is ultimately ruined and she is sent to a nunnery. (She would have been married off at age 15 or so anyway, of course.)

Laclos and Nabokov both get the teeny-bopper language down perfectly, which in the case of Laclos was quite an amazing accomplishment given the fictional and literary conventions of that era. Laclos got more flak for Cécile's illiterate French than he did for the evil of the plot.

Comments

"No, don't slow down, you dull bulb..." (p. 113, Lolita speaking).

> "Dim bulb" or "dimbub" is what I've always heard. One wonders whether Nabokov might have

heard wrong or misremembered, though it could easily be a regional variant.

*And so to the elevator, daughter swinging her old white purse, father walking in front (*nota bene*: never behind, she is not a lady)*... (p. 121)

Here and in a couple of other places Nabokov misses a chance to introduce the “that wasn’t a lady, that was my wife” joke. The word “lady” is fun when teaching ESL students sociolinguistics.

I still hear the nasal voices of those invisibles serenading her, people with names like Sammy and Jo and Eddy and Tony and Peggy and Guy and Patti and Rex, and sentimental song hits, all of them as similar to my ear as her various candies were to my palate (p. 148).

Appel (pp. 386-7) identifies these musicians as Sammy Kaye, Jo Stafford, Eddie Fisher, Tony Bennett, Peggy Lee, Guy Mitchell, and Patti Page and then says: "But this information isn’t campy if you don’t know who these invisibles are, and that their sentimental songs of love and romance were very corny, and backed by ludicrously fulsome string arrangements."

Peggy Lee and Tony Bennett, at least, were jazz singers who don't deserve this. Appel talks about his high musical standards, but Nabokov apparently was relatively uninterested in music: in "Speak, Memory" he mentions his father's "very early, and lifelong passion for opera" adding that "along this vibrant string a melodious gene that missed me glides through my father from the sixteenth century organist Wolfgang Gran to my son [an opera singer]." (*Portable Nabokov*, pp. 52-3). In his attitude toward American music, Kurt Goedel is an interesting contrast to Nabokov: according to his biographer Hao Wang, he came to prefer American to Viennese pop.

Zoot, the saxophone playing puppet in the Muppets, is not a tribute to fashion [zoot suits] but to John Haley (Zoot) Sims (1925-1985), the great tenor saxophonist.

Appel (p. 389) might not be terribly musical himself. Zoot Sims was not "great".

… a last rufous mountain with a rich rug of lucerne at its foot… (p. 156). Appel note, p. 390: *lucerne: a deep-rooted European herb with bluish-purple flowers; in the US usually called alfalfa.*

Alfalfa has been a major American forage crop since the mid-19th century and is probably more

important in America than in Europe. If you do insist on an ethnic identification, alfalfa originated in Persia. "Lucerne" is just one of several European names for alfalfa, and not the most common.

...bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on singularly lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad (p. 174).

Certainly a reference to Victor Hugo's 1877 *L'art d'être Grand-Père*. Hugo was a highly affectionate grandfather who was otherwise noted for randiness, and who once told his four-year-old granddaughter that she had a cute ass (*con*).

Miss Pratt tells Humbert that Dolores Haze *…is already involved in a whole system of social life which consists, whether we like it or not, of hot-dog stands, corner drugstores, malts and cokes, movies, square-dancing, blanket parties on beaches, and even hair-fixing parties!* (p. 177).

I'm only 11 years younger than Miss Haze, who celebrated her 77th birthday in 2012. (when Phoebe Caulfield was only 73). I cannot believe that square-dancing was any more part of youth culture during the jitterbug era than it was during the rock'n'roll era. I can't even believe that Miss

Pratt might have thought it was. During my country childhood square-dancing was archaic entertainment encouraged by the churches and schools.

....her slow languorous columbine kisses kept me from mischief... (p. 259).

French kisses. The term "columbine kisses" is used in Huysmans' *Au rebours* (which was once quintessentially decadent, but now is a white-bread yuppie shopping guide). According to Huysmans, columbine kisses were condemned by the Church.

Feu. This time I hit something hard...(p. 302).

Could the French word *"feu",* literally "fire!", also be weakly onomatopoeic for the gunshot, which in this case was apparently a bit fizzly and ineffective? And might an (etymologically unrelated) meaning of this word also be in play: "deceased", as in *feu mon père*. I don't know whether this word would be used with a proper name ("*feu* Clare Quilty") but maybe the idea was lurking in there somewhere.

The real Humbert Humbert?

There is no attempt to identify a model for Humbert Humbert in *The Annotated Lolita*. The novel often echoes Poe (who married a fourteen-year-old cousin), and sometimes Lewis Carroll, whose peculiar interest in young girls would land him in jail today. The annotated version was produced with Nabokov's cooperation, and in his gentlemanly way Nabokov was careful not to reveal information which might embarrass living people (though in the case of a certain kinky tennis player, enough information was given to make it easy enough to track him down).

There is, however, a plausible candidate for the "original Humbert". Umberto Saba was an Italian poet from Trieste, where he was an acquaintance of James Joyce. He wrote personal, non-modernist poems in pure classical Italian, and has come to be regarded as one of the three great Italian poets of the first half of the twentieth century, along with Ungaretti and Montale.

Saba, the genteel proprietor of a bookshop, was the most mild-mannered of men, but in the words of a friend, "he loved the girls and he loved the boys; he loved the men and he loved the women." Among his poems are a number of erotic poems about boys and girls which tend not to be translated into English.[1]

I am less able to fake it in Italian than in several other languages, but "*È mezza bambina e mezza bestia. Eppure l'ami"* ("She's half baby girl and half animal – and yet I love her") and "*Maria ti guarda con gli occhi un poco come Venere loschi"* ("The Virgin Mary watches you with the sleazy eyes of Venus") seem explicit enough.

In Lolita, Humbert's origins were on the French Riviera, and in an earlier sketch which Nabokov discarded, the Humbert-figure was vaguely Eastern European. Saba's Trieste is probably as close as you can get to an Eastern European / Riviera cross. Saba died in 1957, and Lolita was published in 1954,[2] so Nabokov's rule about not embarrassing the living would have required him not to mention Saba directly while still allowing him to leave us some clues. The fact that Saba was almost unknown in the English-speaking world at that time, and is hardly famous here now, further protected him.

Saba did some of the things that other libertine avant-gardists did, but he didn't aspire to be a Satanic figure. He was just an example of a kind of snuffy kinkiness which seems to have been common in pre-WWI Europe, and perhaps even today, but which has always been shocking to Americans.

Nabokov was careful to dissociate himself from Humbert ("a disgusting pervert"), and he made sure that he died miserably, but one wonders whether he found him shocking in the same way that most of his American readers did -- though at the same time, he may just have been giving earnest Americans strenuously sophisticating themselves a chance to embarrass themselves with their inappropriate tolerance. The terrible thing that Nabokov does show us is that Lolita was Humbert's captive and had nowhere else to go. As for the purity of childhood, however, she was already not a virgin when Humbert seduced her, having done a bit of experimentation the summer before with the boy at the lake.

Appendix

> In *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert points out that the age of consent for girls in Roman law, Church law, and American law has been as low as twelve, and seldom higher than fifteen – but only within marriage, and with the consent of the parents. He also makes a snarky remark about the Mann Act (which has to do mostly with women) and is fully aware of the American "Children and Young Persons Act of 1933", according to which a "child" is younger than fourteen, and a "young person" is between fourteen and seventeen.

We are in a rather peculiar place these days with respect to juvenile sexuality. The whole public space is intensely sexualized, adult sexual mores are free and easy, and few parents really expect chastity from their teenagers any more; yet almost everywhere the legal threshold of childhood (which had been as low as fourteen in several states) has been raised to eighteen. In a way it wasn't 50 years ago it also seems to be assumed now, even by the liberated, that any relationship between an older and a younger partner is sick, if the age difference is very great, even if both are adults.

The legal borderlines vary, but it is now possible for a 21 year old to be labeled a sex criminal for life for having a relationship with a 15 year old. The odd twist is that nowadays kids under 18 *can* have sex, but having sex with real people (adults) has become a forbidden privilege of adulthood, like alcohol, tobacco, voting, and serving in the military.

Against this, there is testimony about May-September romances which were positive for both partners – granted that almost all love affairs end more or less badly. Many of the medieval romances have heroines who are thirteen to fifteen years old: *Menina e Moça, Aucassin et Nicolette,*

Romeo and Juliet, some of the stories in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In all these stories the young lady is portrayed as hot to trot — though in most cases the boy is about the same age as the girl.

In my own college experience, back in the early sixties when the Sexual Revolution was not yet quite rampant, "don't ask / don't tell" faculty-student relationships, both gay and straight, were quite common. At least two classmates married faculty members immediately after graduation, and I still see one of them occasionally: she's still married to the same guy, who's only eight years older than she is. When I met her at a recent reunion I suggested that her marriage be annulled, and she laughed.

None of this in any way excuses Humbert Humbert's abusive machinations or any of the other egregious cases of child rape which we keep hearing about. Perhaps it is only to suggest that there was something excessive about The Sexual Revolution when it hit in the 50s, 60s, and 70s -- Sex Is Good, Repression Is Bad, If It Feels Good, Do It -- and that this enabled child abuse and forced a legal adjustment which made the post-revolutionary era in certain respects more restrictive than the earlier period.

Notes

1. The Italian words are *fanciullo* "boy" (plural *fanciulli*, which can also just mean "children") and *fanciulla* "girl" (plural *fanciulle*). For me, with my limited knowledge of Italian, there's quite a bit of ambiguity in these poems. Sometimes it seems that Saba, like Proust, is pretending that a boy is a girl, and other times I wonder whether he was sexualizing actual children, or whether he was just role-playing childish fantasies with legal young adults. There probably are answers to these questions, but I don't have them.

I'd also like to file a complaint here about the bilingual dictionaries of the world, most of which stubbornly refuse to list plurals and other inflected forms separately, even in a case like *fanciulli,* which has the additional meaning, "children", and is not just the plural of the singular "boy".

2. *Lolita* was published three years before Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, making the first great American "road novel". Travel through Colorado is featured in both novels, as it was in the lives of their authors. Someone should put the timelines on a map to see whether Nabokov, Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Humbert Humbert, Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty, et al, were ever at the same place at the same (real or fictional) time.

Everything you ever wanted to know about Mozart and Salieri

Nadezhda Mandlestam (tr. McLean), *Mozart and Salieri*.

Alexander Pushkin, tr. Anderson, “Mozart and Salieri” in *The Little Tragedies*.

Albert I. Borowitz, “Salieri and the ‘Murder’ of Mozart.” *The Musical Quarterly* 59.2 (1973), pp. 268-79.

The Mozart and Salieri legend reached its highest point in the early 20th century, when Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam developed a new metaphysics of poetry: for poetry to be great, the “Mozart principle” and the “Salieri principle” must both be satisfied. The “Mozart principle” (also called “the impulse” or “the work of the poet”) is what we would call “inspiration”; the Salieri principle, “the work of the artist”, was craft and laborious effort.

Since Akhmatova and Mandelstam also gave poetry and creativity a remarkably high ontological status, what they did here was to designate fundamental

aspects of the structure of their universe with the names of these two musicians on the basis of a piece of malicious gossip, and while there may have been some (e.g. Theodor Adorno) who would have felt this justified in the case of Mozart, giving that degree of importance to Salieri must seem excessive to everyone. Whatever happened between Mozart and Salieri was at worst just one instance of murderous Holy Roman court intrigue, and it is most likely that nothing happened at all and the story was just slander. Either was, not something we would normally want to put into our metaphysical system.

Akhmatova and Mandelstam's Mozart / Salieri antithesis can be traced back to Pushkin's "little tragedy" *Mozart and Salieri*. Akhmatova claimed that Mozart in that play represented Pushkin's Polish friend Adam Mickiewicz, who improvised poetry with great ease, and that Salieri represented Pushkin himself, who wrote slowly and painfully (as Akhmatova was able to show on the evidence of Pushkin's drafts):

> *Akhmatova maintained that Mozart personified Mickiewicz with his spontaneity and that Pushkin identified himself and his work with Salieri. I was very much amazed by this idea: it had always seemed to me that precisely in Mozart I had recognized Pushkin – carefree, idle, but such a genius that everything comes to him easily and*

simply…. Due to academic ignorance we think that "inspired" poetry does not demand the slightest labor.

N. Mandelstam, p. 15

Mandelstam picked up the idea and ran with it:

In his articles from the year 1922 Mandelstam twice repudiated Mozart and extolled Salieri ….. Mozart, who is led by impulses, is a blind man; Salieri, the intellectual principle, is a leader

N. Mandelstam, pp. 18 and 89.

However, he later qualified his position:

In every poet there is both a Mozart and a Salieri

N. Mandelstam, p.18

Akhmatova eventually dropped the theory of Pushkin's Salierianism. But by then Salieri had become, for the Mandelstam circle, one of the fundamental metaphysical principles of creation. It was Akhmatova who had named these two principles, about which Nadezhka Mandelstam is skeptical:

Dostoevsky distinguished two stages in the creation of the thing – the work of a poet and the work of an artist. Was there in such a division and exact understanding of the essence of the work of the artist? Most likely this was simply still another conventional division of the two principles of creative work. In Akhmatova's conversation these two principles were called "Mozart" and " Salieri", although in fact the "little tragedy" provides no basis for such a generalization.

N. Mandelstam, pp. 83-4

Before going to Akhmatova and Mandelstam's source in Pushkin, it's worth taking a quick look at Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera *Mozart and Salieri*, the libretto of which came, almost word-for-word, from Pushkin's play. The idea that Rimsky-Korsakoff identified himself with Salieri, and his friend Musorgsky with Mozart,is a much better fit than the Mickiewicz / Pushkin theory. Like Pushkin's Mozart, Musorgsky was dissolute, and like Mickiewicz, he was famous for his improvisations. Like Salieri, Rimsky-Korsakoff was a schooled musician who followed the rules and worked steadily, and like Pushkin's Salieri, Rimsky-Korsakoff feared that his irregular, wasted, self-taught friend might be the greater artist – as indeed turned out to be the case.

Even the form of Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Mozart and Salieri* can be thought of as Musorgskyian. The first composer who, instead of adapting it for musical purposes, scored a written text exactly (as Rimsky-Korsakoff did here, and as Debussy and others were to do later) was the minor Russian composer Dargomizhky in his opera *The Stone Guest* (from Puskin's "little tragedy" version of the Don Juan story); but the second composer to do this was Dargomizhky's disciple Musorgsky in his unfinished opera *Zhenitba*.

In Pushkin's play, Salieri speaks of his laborious dedication to craft, and this is one of the principles with which Mandelstam identified himself, contrasting himself to some of his contemporaries (for example Bryusov: N. Mandlestam, p. 50):

> *Early I refused all idle amusements;*
> *To know anything other than music*
> *Was hateful to me. Stubbornly and proudly*
> *I denied all else and gave myself up*
> *To music alone. The first steps were hard*
> *And the first path was tedious. I overcame*
> *My early difficulties. I gave craft*
> *Its place as the foundation of my art; I made myself a craftsman; my fingers*
> *Acquired obedient, cold dexterity*
> *And my ear, accuracy. I killed sounds,*
> *Dissected music like a corpse. I put harmony*

To the test of algebra. Only after that,
Experienced in my studies, did I dare
Allow myself the luxury of creative dreams.

Pushkin, p. 56, lines 8-24

Salieri also speaks of the dignity of the artist, and I suspect that Mandelstam is also thinking of this aspect:

Where is rightness, when the sacred gift,
Immortal genius, comes not as a reward
For ardent love and self-renunciation,
Labor, zeal, diligence and prayers –
But bestows its radiant halo on a madman
Who idly strolls through life. Oh, Mozart, Mozart!

Pushkin, p. 57, lines 116-26

Salieri's attitude toward Mozart has theological overtones. The lines above echoes the debate about forgiveness and faith versus works, with Mozart the prodigal son who is saved despite his flaws and Salieri the resentful older brother. In the following passage, Salieri seems to be speaking as a representative of the Church of Art, a corporate entity which is greater than any individual artist, even the greatest among them:

No! I cannot set myself against
My destiny – I am the one who's been chosen

To stop him – or else we all will perish,
All of us, priests and servitors of music,
Not only I with my empty glory…
What is the use if Mozart lives
And even achieves still greater heights?
What he does – will it elevate Art? No,
It will fall again when he has vanished;
No heir of his will remain among us.

Pushkin, p. 60, lines 116-126.

Finally we must ask ourselves: did Salieri actually poison Mozart? Borowitz's article covers the topic quite well, and I will summarize it:

1. The medical evidence is completely inconclusive. The medicine of the time was crude, there was no autopsy, and cliodiagnostics is famous for its wild inaccuracy.

2. During that period, poisoning was a fairly common type of murder. Rumors about poisonings were rife (not just about Mozart), and actual poisonings were not rare.

3. Salieri was a rival of Mozart and often did him harm, though they were socially friendly; when he publicly admired Mozart's music, he could have just been

covering his tracks. On the other hand, one rumor Pushkin heard about Salieri's malevolence has been shown to have been false.

4. It is well-attested that in the months before his death Mozart did believe that he was being poisoned. The Mozart family talked about the rumors for decades, without seeming to come to any conclusion about them. (After Mozart's death, Salieri was hired to teach Mozart's son). Beethoven, a friend and admirer of both men, seems not to have believed the rumors, though others did.

5. The rumors became especially loud after 1823, 31 years after Mozart's death, apparently in connection with a court intrigue of that time. (These were the rumors that inspired Pushkin's play). As time went on, the rumors became more and more lurid and anti-Semitic, without any actual Jews having been involved, and eventually they were picked up by Nazis.

6. Salieri died in a state of dementia after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. On his deathbed he denied that he poisoned Mozart at least once. The report that he confessed on his deathbed is highly unreliable.

We are left with the peculiarly unsatisfactory conclusion that these rumors cannot be dismissed, but are

impossible to prove or disprove, and that this situation which seems highly unlikely ever to change. And this leads us to the next question: How could a scandal of this type ever give its name to a deep metaphysical principle?

To begin with, Akhmatova and Mandelstam's Salieri and Mozart are entirely based on Pushkin. Pushkin seems to have taken the story at face value, but it seems unlikely that he intended for his play to be taken as serious history. Akhmatova's theory that Mozart represents Mickiewicz is on the whole doubtful. It may be that the contrast between hard-working Salieri and fast-working Mozart was based on the Pushkin / Mickiewicz contrast, but Salieri's criticism of Mozart's frivolity also could have been applied to Pushkin himself (and was, by Bestuzhev and Zhukovsky).

Salieri's expressed convictions about the dignity of art may have been shared by Mandelstam and Akhmatova, but you have to ask whether Mandelstam was just teasing and being perverse. Nadezhka Mandelstam says (p. 9) that *Mandelstam was a hopeless debater… It was easy to draw him into a debate about general philosophical problems.* She also reports (p. 13) that Akhmatova, *"knowing how difficult it was to get anything sensible out of him [Mandelstam]"* would ask questions of Nadezhka, rather than her husband, whenever she wanted to find out what Mandelstam really thought about anything.

By contrast, if you believe that Mandelstam was serious, that makes Mandelstam seem to be the inhabitant of in a hothouse, funhouse-mirror world where the compass points east and west. He gets everything wrong, and one wonders how he could have come up with the Mozart-Salieri principle if he had ever listened to either composer. Mandelstam's Mozart was a free-wheeling, expressive romantic who composes on impulse, but Mozart's music is formally more demanding than Salieri's. Mozart just worked faster, possibly because he started his training at an earlier age and was the more masterful craftsman, but maybe just because he had the habit of working things out in his head before writing them down. As for the dignity of the artist, Mozart was hardly the clown that Salieri in the play accuses him of being (much less the maniac in the stupid movie), and it even seems possible that Salieri's accusations against Mozart in the play stand in for similar accusations made against Pushkin.

Mandelstam's metaphysical elevation of Pushkin's two characters is all the stranger because real models for Mandelstam's models did exist, but Mandelstam got all the names wrong. In the role of the hard-working, serious-minded, angsty composer who works slowly and does not rely on inspiration, Beethoven would have been a far better choice than the lightweight Salieri. Beethoven's worksheets were famously messy, and his

themes would go through many different versions before one was finally regarded as acceptable.

Similarly, when Mandelstam writes “*Shame on you, French Romantics, wretched incroyables in red vests”* (p. 86), the “red vest” stands for Théophile Gautier and his famous red garment (whatever it was -- probably not a vest, maybe a topcoat) at the premiere of Hugo’s play *Hernani* in 1830. But Gautier was on Mandelstam' side, a formalist who taught French poetry to be difficult:

Oui, l’œuvre sort plus belle
D’une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

Gautier, *L’Art*

It was Victor Hugo who Mandelstam should have targeted, not Gautier: Hugo was a poetry machine who literally produced poetry in his sleep. Since Mandelstam (who I am unable to read), has been hailed as the greatest poet of the 20th century, it seems best to conclude that he wasn’t an idiot, and that the names he chose for his metaphysical principles were just perverse, and that's OK, since (whatever I seem to have said above) I believe that metaphysical perversity is, by and large, a very good thing.

Appendix:
Mickiewicz and Tchaikovsky

To complete the circle: Pushkin's friend Mickiewicz was a Polish nationalist who died in exile in the Ottoman Empire, where many Polish nationalists had gone in hopes of fighting against Russia. (There was a Polish-speaking village in Turkey up until fairly recently). One of the leaders of these nationalists was Michał Czajkowski, also a poet, who converted to Islam and took the name of Sadyk Pasha. (Czajkowski is the Polish spelling of Tchaikovsky: other spellings include Tschaikowski, Čajkovskij, Ciajkovskij, Chaikovski, Tsjaikovski, Tjajkovskij, Tchaikovski, Chaikovsky, Chaykovsky, Chaikovskiy, Chaykovskiy, Chaikovskii, Čajkovskij, and Čajkovski.

Sadyk Pasha" was Musorgsky's malicious nickname for the composer P. I. Tchaikovsky, the man who invented lite classical. Musorgsky's group of nationalist composers (the kuchka, the Free Music Society) was feuding with Tchaikovsky's more mainstream Russian Music Society, calling them "the Germans" because they promoted German music. (Most of the Germans were actually Jews born in Russia, but up to a certain point in history Jews were often stereotyped as Germans). The only other members of the RMS I can find are Anton Rubinstein, Nikolai Rubinstein, Alexander Famintsïn, and Nikolai Zaremba, of whom only Anton

Rubenstein is remembered today, and just barely. Of the nationalists, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Borodin, and Balakirev are still played (though Rimsky-Korsakoff ended up as a German like Tchaikovsky.

I initially wondered whether Mandelstam's initial willingness to misrepresent Mozart as a bad guy might have been a hangover of the Russian composers' nationalistic anti-German feeling, but it seems much more likely that he would have sided with the formalist Germans of the Russian Musical Society. But then again, Mandelstam seems never to have been precise.

Three entomologists; three in corduroy

Vladimir Nabokov's butterfly-collecting activities are well known, but not everyone knows that the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok and the Franco-Belgian poet Henri Michaux were also entomologists, albeit amateurs compared to Nabokov.

Similarly, Erik Satie, Henry David Thoreau, and George Sand were all known for wearing corduroy, but in Satie's case it was called *velours côtelé* and he was not blamed.

"Velvet gentleman" isn't right[1]. And "corduroy" isn't the word in French, though the English word comes from French. But Americans of that era regarded corduroy as Irish, and ladies were not supposed to wear corduroy or smoke cigars, so the other two did not get off so easily.

Note

1. Roger Shattuck also got this right, so I cannot claim a discovery.

Dolores was normal, Frauleins Dora and Else were sick

Nabokov had a virulent dislike for the works of Sigmund Freud. You have to wonder whether he might have had this passage in mind when he planned his book:

> *He then came back, and, instead of going out by the open door, suddenly clasped the girl to him and pressed a kiss upon her lips. This was surely a situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never been approached. But Dora had at that moment a violent feeling of disgust.... In this scene,.... the behavior of this child of fourteen was already entirely and completely hysterical. I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion of sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable*.
>
> Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,* pp. 43-44.

Arthur Schnitzler's *Fraulein Else* -- the intense stream-of-consciousness story of the final days of a young woman who kills herself rather than pose nude for a creep her high-living father wants to borrow money from -- eerily resembles Dora's case history. Freud and

Schnitzler were Viennese contemporaries who ran in somewhat the same circles, and it is impossible that when Schnitzler wrote his story he was unaware of Freud's earlier study. Schnitzler perfectly captured Else's voice, with its mix of frivolity, cynicism, intelligence, and desperation, her lucid understanding of her situations, and her inability to imagine an escape.

Erik Satie and the Sewing Machine

Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse.*

Michael de Cossart, *Food of Love: Princesse Edmond de Polignac (1865-1943) and her Salon.*

During the great days of early twentieth century Paris, one of the leading Parisian patrons of the arts was the lesbian Princesse de Polignac, who commissioned major works by Stravinsky, Satie, Ravel, Prokofiev, Poulenc, and others. La Princesse was the widow of Prince Edmond of Polignac and the ex-wife of Prince Louis de Scey-Montbéliard -- though neither marriage had been consummated. Her first marriage, arranged by her mother against her will, had been annulled, but the gay Prince Edmond de Polignac fortunately had no desire for consummation, and the two lived as good friends and partners in philanthropy. (Edmond, as it happens, was a grandson of the royalist Auguste Jules Armand Polignac, whose excesses instigated the 1830 revolution).

This all sounds ever so sophisticated and continental, but La Princesse was born Winnaretta Singer, one of the twenty-two children by the five wives or mistresses, mostly named Mary, of the American inventor, Shakespearean actor, and jack-of-all-trades Isaac Merritt Singer. Singer's supposed invention of the

sewing machine (with a little help from Elias Howe) had made him very rich, and when he died in 1875 he left a huge fortune to be divided among his wives and children (or most of them).

With this fortune Winnaretta's mother (who was Franco-Irish and had been Bartholdi's model for the Statue of Liberty) succeeded in marrying herself and her two daughters to princes. Winnaretta's first match, Prince Louis de Scey-Montbéliard, objected to her violent refusal of consummation, but the next prince was more understanding. Princess Winnaretta had no children, as might be expected, but when her princess sister Isabelle-Blanche committed suicide, Winnaretta took charge of her daughter Marguerite Séverine Philippine Decazes de Glücksberg, and Margeurite's 1910 marriage to Prince Jean Amédée Marie Anatole de Broglie (also reputed to be gay) produced three more princesses, one of whom became Daisy Fellowes.

Winnaretta was an American Girl ™ mostly in her independent-mindedness. While she had been born in Yonkers (!), she only spent the first two years of her life in the United States and did not enjoy the visit she made late in life. She spent most of her early life in England and most of the rest of her life in France. However, she seems to have had a fondness for American literature: she published a French translation of Thoreau's *Walden* (a book Proust had supposedly also wanted to translate),

and on her aristocratic husband's deathbed she comforted him by reading from the writings of Mark Twain.

Conclusions:

1. The novelist is known to us as "Isaac Bashevis Singer" because before him there already had been a famous American named Isaac Singer, who may or may not have originally been Jewish: one German biographer of the inventor says that Isaac's father "came from a Jewish family named Reisinger in Saxony", though none of the American sources have picked up on this. In the U.S. Isaac M. was a Christian.

2. Parvenu princesses from rich but disreputable families often perform as well as real princesses, and while arranged marriages are not an American custom (as Tocqueville pointed out), American girls can play that game pretty damn well. Erik Satie is one of my favorite composers and eccentrics, and any friend of his is a friend of mine.

3. Well-born people have more names than we do. But what kind of hillbilly name is Winnaretta? (The other Winnarettas Google has found are all Canadian or British: Winnaretta (McNamara) Howe, gave birth to daughter, 1907, NB, Canada; Helma Winnaretta Randel, b. 1913, UK; Winnaretta Raven, b. 1917, UK; Christena Winnaretta Gillespie, married 1906, BC, Canada.)

The New Republic not funded with fascist money

A rumor has been circulating that the money Martin Peretz used to fund *The New Republic* was inherited by his wife Anne Labouisse Farnsworth from a fascist gold bug grandfather who tried to overthrow the U.S. government during the 1930s. This is incorrect; the fascist in question was Peretz's wife's great-uncle, Robert Sterling Clark, and as far as is known at this time, the grandfather from whom she inherited the money, Stephen Carlton Clark, was not an active fascist.

It has also been rumored that the money inherited traces back to the inventor of the sewing machine, Isaac Merrit Singer. While the money does trace back to the Singer Sewing Machine Company, Isaac Singer did not really invent the sewing machine, and Peretz's uxorial nest egg traces back to Singer's patent lawyer Edward Clark, who was granted a full partnership in return for wresting the sewing machine patent away from the actual inventor, Elias Howe.

It is also not true that Peretz is a grandson of the Yiddish author Isaac Bashevis Singer. The Yiddish author of whom Peretz is the grandson was Isaac Leib Peretz. No Isaac Singer of any description has been implicated in Peretz's operation.

Peretz and his wife are now separated, and Peretz has sold TNR It is not known whether Peretz dumped his wife when her money ran out, or whether his wife dumped Peretz after he'd spent all her money, or even whether things might even have been (*per impossibile*) completely on the up and up. In any case, if you run into Martin, I'm sure he'd appreciate it if you bought him a meal and lent him a couple of bucks.

Freud and Lewis Carroll

More than thirty-five years ago my first reading of Freud happened to coincide with a dramatic natural event which had the effect of greatly reducing my interest in his work. Near where I lived a fir tree struck by lightning caught fire forty feet from the ground, and it took a fire truck over an hour to put the fire out. Almost every summer, many square miles of Western forests burn in fires started this way, and these fires require the efforts of hundreds of men and women to extinguish. Seeing even a single tree on fire like this gives you an enormous appreciation of the power of fire in the natural world.

Unfortunately the text of Freud's I was reading at that time included the passage below, and even after making all due allowances for the fact that Freud lived in cities all his life, and giving him credit for putting his conjecture into a rather sheepish footnote, what he wrote is still terribly silly:

> *If we go back far enough, we find that the first acts of civilization were the use of tools, the gaining of control over fire, and the construction of dwellings. Among these, the control of fire stands out as a quite extraordinary and unexampled achievement.... Psycho-analytic material, incomplete as it is and not susceptible to clear*

interpretation, nevertheless admits of a conjecture – a fantastic-sounding one – about the origins of this human feat. It is as though primal man had the habit, when he came into contact with fire, of satisfying the infantile desire connected with it, by putting it out with a stream of his urine. The legends that we possess leave no doubt about the originally phallic view taken of tongues of flame as they shoot upward. Putting out the fire by micturating – a theme to which modern giants, Gulliver in Lilliput and Rabelais' Gargantua, still hark back – was therefore a kind of sexual act with a male, an enjoyment of sexual potency in a homosexual competition. The first person to renounce this desire and spare the fire was able to carry it off with him and subdue it to his own use. By damping down the fire of his own sexual excitation, he had tamed the natural force of fire. This great cultural conquest was thus the reward for his renunciation of instinct. Further, it is as though woman had been appointed guardian of the fire which was held captive on the domestic hearth, because her anatomy made it impossible for her to yield to the temptation of this desire.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, tr. Strachey, Norton, 1930/1984.

Freud also conjectured that stone age women, well aware of their lack of built-in firefighting equipment, made pitiful, femmy attempts to compensate for this deficiency -- attempts which, while unsuccessful, did lead to the development of one of the femmy crafts:

> *It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented -- that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals. The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another, while on the body they stick into the skin and are only matted together. If you reject this idea as fantastic and regard my belief in the influence of the lack of a penis on the configuration of femininity as an idee fixe, I am of course defenseless.*

Freud, S. "Lecture 33: Femininity", 1933, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,* Standard Edition, vol. 22, pp. 136-157.

Thinking about the fire I had just witnessed in the light of Freud's thought, I had a flash of insight: *Our ancestors were just too stupid to live.*

I imagined a band of cave men gathered around a fire like the one I saw, incontinently and ecstatically squirting their tiny streams of urine in the futile effort to extinguish the raging fire, while at the same time their resentful, feminist wives tried furiously to weave themselves little fake penises even more useless than the men's real penises. And became convinced that the human race, deluded as it was, wasn't going to make it. We are, as a species, like Lewis Carroll's "bread-and-butterfly", incapable of survival:

> *--You may observe a bread-and-butterfly. Its wings are thin slices of bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar.*
> *--And what does it live on?*
> *-- Weak tea with cream in it.*
>
> *A new difficulty came into Alice's head.*
>
> *-- Supposing it couldn't find any? - she suggested.*
> *-- Then it would die, of course.*
> *-- But that must happen very often, - Alice remarked thoughtfully.*
> *-- It always happens, - said the Gnat.*

Of course, there remains the question of where we came from, since our ancestors clearly became extinct before they even had time to breed. But no theory explains everything, and one of the strengths of a good theory is that it leads to questions for further research.

A letter of a kind I'm glad never to have received

London, May 16, 1751

My Dear Friend,

In about three months from this day, we shall probably meet. I look upon that moment as a young woman does upon her bridal night; I expect the greatest pleasure, and yet cannot help fearing some admixture of pain.....

This is Lord Chesterfield writing *to his son.* Where are the Freudians when you need them? I am very glad that I never received a letter like this from my own father.

Lord Chesterfield constantly nagged his bastard about not being shallow, frivolous, and artificial enough. He recommended that he take two mistresses, one of them a high society lady to teach him the airs and graces, and the other a girl of convenience. His bastard was touring Europe, and while he was there Lord Chesterfield continually pimped him to fine ladies — asking them to send back reports (most of which were negative).

The son was a serious-minded, scholarly sort and he resisted as best he could, but he didn’t have what it took to make the appropriate response to the letter above -- though I cannot image in what that that could have been like. In any case, he died young.

Lie Down In Darkness
William Styron

A.

"Marry a Jew or a Chinaman or a Swede, it's all fine if you're prompted by any motive, including money, save that of guilt".

Milton Loftis, p. 74.

I entirely agree. May none of you ever marry a Swede from motives of guilt.

B.

QUIZ

1. When William Styron has Peyton Loftis say of her relationship to her father Milton "I think we have a Freudian attachment", is Styron

    a.) telegraphing his punch,

    b.) belaboring the obvious, or

    c.) going postmodern and meta ahead of the rest?

2. When Styron keeps talking about Peyton's hips, isn't the interest he's taking in his fictional character's ass as unhealthy, in its way, as Milton Loftis's Oedipal fixation on his daughter — pretty much regardless of how lovely Peyton's fictional ass really was?

3. They seem to be finally making a movie out of the book. In her prime, wouldn't Brooke Shields have made a great Peyton Loftis?

4. Helen Peyton Loftis thought that her daughter Peyton Loftis was irredeemably evil by nature, whereas William Styron thought that it was Helen who was irredeemably evil. Might not the entire Peyton line have been an evil spawn cursed by God, so that both were right?

Wodehouse Quiz

Wooster and Jeeves represent which two social types?

a. Jeeves represents the working class; Wooster represents the idle rentier class.

b. Wooster represents the parasitical aristocracy; Jeeves represents their also-parasitical lackeys.

c. Wooster represents the powerless and silly Mikado or Caliph whose power is purely symbolic; Jeeves represents the businesslike Shogun or Sultan who holds all real power.

d. The ignorant Wooster represents the dominant property-owning moiety of the dominant class; the well-read Jeeves represents the dominated intellectual moiety. Wodehouse's portrait of their relationship is the wishful projection of the dominated intelligentsia.

The demoiselle novel and Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*.

The fundamentals of the demoiselle novel are pretty simple. In general you need a demoiselle, a social-climbing parent or step-parent, an evil conspirator, an evil seducer, and a hapless suitor. Theoretically this adds up to five characters, but there's often enough one character plays two roles (e. g. evil conspirator + stepparent). Overlapping the characters makes things a little simpler, but sophisticated authors also mix things up by doubling some roles or by overlapping one of the villain roles with one of the non-villain roles.

In Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* the stepmother had earlier been a demoiselle of sorts, the evil conspirators are the demoiselle's social-climbing birth parents rather than her stepparent, and the hapless suitor Warburton, after first unsuccessfully courting the quasi-demoiselle stepmother,[1] later unsuccessfully courts the true demoiselle stepdaughter. Warburton is the farcical anti-Humbert: evil stepfather Humbert Humbert courted the mother to get next to the daughter (who technically became his stepdaughter), but Warburton courted the stepdaughter (unsuccessfully) in part because he still loved the stepmother (who would have become his own stepmother-in-law).

Pansy Osmond has two hapless suitors but no evil seducer. This is possible because 19th century novels from the United States, where sex had not yet been discovered, tended to avoid any hint of actual intercourse. At age 20 Pansy Osmond is a bit too old to still be a demoiselle rather than an old maid (just as her stepmother had been), but there she is, right there in the convent, cute as a bug and utterly adorable.

Dolores Haze, Cécile Volanges, Pansy Osmond, Fraulein Else T.: all these young women are prisoners. Cécile, Pansy, and Else are sitting on the shelf waiting to be married off, wheras Lolita is in the legal custody of her evil seducer / stepparent. High-society novels portray a frivolous but murderous elite, and Else at least understands this perfectly. These novels are at the other end of the scale from the naturalist novels about the lower depths, but the brutality is hardly less.

Note

1. Though she was indeed an heiress married for her money, Isabel Archer had never really been a proper demoiselle. She had been ruled only by her own free will and essentially functioned as her own social-climbing parent, as if she were both her husband's wife and his father-in-law. Gilbert Osmond himself tried ever so hard to be a decadent Rodolphe, but he was painting by number and never got it quite right.

Case studies:

Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov:

Demoiselle: Dolores Haze (American girl ™);
Social-climbing parents: Charlotte Haze; Humbert Humbert (stepparent).
Seducers / evil conspirators: Humbert Humbert, Clare Quilty.
Defeated suitor: Clare Quilty? Humbert Humbert? Richard Schiller?

Portrait of a Lady A, Henry James.

Demoiselle: Pansy Osmond, (American convent girl ™).
Social climbing parents / evil conspirators: Gabriel Osmond, Madame Merle.
Seducer: None so far.
Defeated suitors: Edward Rosier, Lord Warburton.

Portrait of a Lady B, Henry James.

Demoiselle: Isabel Archer.
Social-climbing parent: self: an American girl.
Seducers / conspirators: Gabriel Osmond, Madame Merle.
Defeated suitors: Caspar Goodwood, Lord Warburton, Ralph Touchett.

Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Choderlos de Laclos:

Demoiselle: Cécile Volanges (convent girl ™).
Social-climbing parent: Mme. de Volanges.
Seducers / conspirators: Mme. Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont.
Defeated suitor: Chevalier Dancey.

Fräulein Else, Arthur Schnitzler:

Demoiselle: Else T.
Social-climbing parent / conspirator: Herr T.
Seducer / conspirator: Herr von Dorsday
Defeated Suitor: Fred.

Tocqueville on Isabel Archer

But no American woman falls into the toils of matrimony as into a snare held out to her simplicity and ignorance. She has been taught beforehand what is expected of her, and voluntarily and freely does she enter upon this engagement. She supports her new condition with courage, because she chose it. As in America paternal discipline is very relaxed and the conjugal tie very strict, a young woman does not contract the latter without considerable circumspection and apprehension.

.....

I am aware that an education of this kind is not without danger; I am sensible that it tends to invigorate the judgment at the expense of the imagination, and to make cold and virtuous women instead of affectionate wives and agreeable companions to man. Society may be more tranquil and better regulated, but domestic life has often fewer charms.

"Adopt the attitude of the octopus"

Πολύποδος νόον ϊσχε
Polypi mentem obtine

The Adages of Erasmus, ed. & tr. William Barker, Toronto, 2001, I i 93, pp. 41-45.

Octopuses are like chameleons, but more so. Not only can they match the color of the surface they're seen against, but in order to blend into the background they can even match complex rippling patterns of color and texture.

Erasmus's treatment of this proverb is fuller and in general more favorable than those given to other similar proverbs dealing with changeability and disguise: -- those on the chameleon (III iv 1 pp. 273-4), the fox (fox v. hedgehog: I v 18, pp. 87-9), and on Proteus (II ii 74, pp. 167-8). In ascending order of dignity, the chameleon is said to represent *a dissembler, or one who is inconstant and adopts any appearance to suit the time*. The fox, with his many tricks, is held to be inferior to the hedgehog with his single very effective trick. The versatility and resourcefulness of the divine shapeshifter Proteus (*twisting and turning…. hard to pin down…. a cunning fellow and jack of all trades)* are treated with a degree of respect, though he hardly seems like someone you could ever count on. In all of these cases,

dissembling and transformation are regarded as evasive tricks primarily useful for someone trying to escape enemies or to keep from called to account.

In *polypi mentem obtine* , however, octopodal changeability, disguise, opportunism and (as Hugo would say) “hypocrisy” are treated more favorably:

> *The proverb is taken from Theognis, whose couplet about the polyp [octopus] exists today:*
>
> > *Adopt the attitude of the many-colored polyp; Moving toward a rock, it straightway takes its hue.*
>
> *This advises us to suit ourselves to every contingency of life, acting the part of Proteus and changing ourselves into any form as the situation demands…There is however a kind of downrightness, edgy and harsh and unsmiling, among inexperienced people; they require everyone to live solely in his own way, and whatever pleases others they condemn. On the contrary there is a sensible attitude which makes men comply on occasion with a different mode of conduct, to avoid being disliked or being able to be of use, or else for the sake of rescuing themselves or their households from great dangers.*

A further such saying or tag in this book is *omnium*

horarum homo (“a man for all seasons [hours]“: I iii 86, pp 70-1), and it was Erasmus who assigned this epithet to his friend Sir Thomas More. What he meant by it was that More could deal with various sorts of people in their various different contexts -- serious when others were serious, fun when others were fun. He contrasted the *omnium horarum homo* to those *who have their own code of behavior and do not find it easy to live with anyone else*, and he made it clear that he felt that the more affable man was superior. (It might be noted, however, that after this had been written the gregarious More was beheaded by his patron, King Henry VIII.)

The above may lead one to suspect that Erasmus was a bit of an opportunist himself, but that was not the case. In fact, he often spoke out forthrightly against the two leading powers of his day — the philosophers and theologians of the Sorbonne with their logic-chopping and venality, and the princes and noblemen with their interminable, pointless wars. Especially in his youth he had been one of the stubborn, solitary types that he now warns against:

> *Indeed, if I had responded to the favors of the important men who had begun to embrace me I would have made something of himself in literature. But an excessive love of independence*

> *caused me to wrestle for a long time with treacherous friends and persistent poverty* (p. 383).

Proverbs themselves have the inconstancy Erasmus recommends for a man of the world, at least in later life, and the five inconstancy maxims we have here do not agree with one another. In two of the proverbs mentioned above, inconstancy is treated mostly as a vice or weakness, in two of them it is regarded as a strength, resource, or virtue, while the Proteus maxim is ambiguous. So what we need, then, is an additional maxim telling us when to apply the other maxims, and somewhere in Erasmus book that control proverb can probably be found.... along with its opposite, ad infinitum. The multi-layered inconsistency of proverbial wisdom and folk knowledge has led moderns to try to devise unambiguous sets of rules which can be rigorously applied everywhere without exception, but these attempts have never been very successful.

Victor Hugo on Cephalopods

The following passage cobbled together from the most vivid lines of a long chapter, adequately represents Hugo's capacity for excess:

> *To believe in the octopus, one must have seen it. Compared with it, the hydras of old are laughable. Orpheus, Homer, and Hesiod were only able to make the Chimera; God made the octopus. When God wills it, he excels in the execrable. And all ideals being admitted, if terror be the object, the octopus is a masterpiece.*
>
> *Its most terrible quality is its softness. A glutinous mass possessed of a will — what more frightful? Glue filled with hatred.*
>
> *At night and in its breeding season, it is phosphorescent. This terror has its passions. It awaits the nuptial hour. It adorns itself, it lights up, it illuminates itself; and from the summit of a rock one can see it beneath, in the shadowy depths, spread out in a pallid irradiation, — a specter sun.*
>
> *It has no bones, it has no blood, it has no flesh. It is flabby. There is nothing in it. It is a skin. One*

> *can turn the eight tentacles wrong side out, like the fingers of a glove.*
>
> (Excerpted from five pages of *Toilers of the Sea*, II iv 2, “The Monster").

Along with his friend Lamennais, Hugo was a pioneer of left Catholicism, sort of. His horrible novelistic octopus is often thought to be symbolic of the insidious and irresistible power of capitalism:

> *The creature superimposes itself upon you by a thousand mouths; the hydra incorporates itself with the man; the man amalgamates himself with the hydra. You form but one. This dream is upon you. It draws you to it, and into it, and bound, ensnared, powerless, you slowly feel yourself emptied into that frightful pond, which is the monster itself. Beyond the terrible, being eaten alive, is the inexpressible, being drunk alive.*

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, etc.

He must be dead or teaching school

Ή τέθνήκεν ή διδάσκει γράμματα.
Aut mortuus est, aut docet litteras.

"He must be either dead or teaching school". *An iambic line current as a proverb, and used in the old days to convey that a man was in great misfortune, though it was not clear what the man was doing. This passed into common speech, as Zenodatus tells us, on the following occasion. The Athenians, under command of Nicias, had on one occasion fought and lost a battle against the Sicilians; they suffered heavy casualties, and many prisoners were taken and carried off to Sicily, where they were compelled to teach Sicilian children their elements. And so the few who escaped and returned to Athens, when asked what so-and-so was doing in Italy, used to reply with the line I have quoted above.*

Desiderius Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, p. 131.

But Juan de Mairena was not dead:

Mairena was — notwithstanding his angelic appearance — basically rather ill-tempered. From time to time he would receive a visit from some paterfamilias complaining, not about the fact that his son had been flunked, but about the casualness of Mairena's examination "Is it enough for you just to look at a boy in order to flunk him?" the visitor would ask, throwing his arms wide in feigned astonishment. An angry scene, albeit a brief one, would inevitably occur: Mairena would answer, red-faced and banging the floor with his cane, "I don't even have to do that much. I just have to look at his father!"

Antonio Machado, *Juan de Mairena*, XVI

The Hypocritical Octopus

In *Travailleurs de la Mer*, I came across this line: "*The octopus is a hypocrite. You don't even notice it, and suddenly it unfolds itself*". For Hugo the octopus is murderous — it lies disguised in ambush, and then suddenly it opens up and *gets you*! -- which indeed it often does, if you're a fish. Elsewhere, Hugo writes of the sea itself "*The wave is hypocritical: it kills, hides the evidence, plays dumb, and smiles*".

To me, the English word hypocrite does not simply mean "someone who feigns innocence" or "someone who blends into the background", which is how Hugo uses it here. As I understand it, hypocrisy is the ostentatious affectation of virtue by someone who is unvirtuous, especially when the hypocrite also loudly condemns someone who has committed the same sin that he himself is committing.

This sent me on a long but interesting wild goose chase through the dictionaries. The consensus seems to be that Hugo, who has never been accused of not being vivid or emphatic enough, was stretching the French language for effect (possibly via an etymological reading of the word), and that his use of the word hypocrite is a bit odd and excessive in French too. Hypocritical deception is a major theme of his book, and when at the end of Book One the vertebrate hypocrite Clubin is eaten

by the mollusc hypocrite octopus at the bottom of the hypocrite sea, it's hard to miss his point.

Below I have extracted another prose poem from Hugo's *Travailleurs de la Mer,* this one a poem on hypocrisy. All his life the hypocrite in question, Clubin, had seemed to be good man, but he had been filled with resentment and anger the whole time, and in the novel he had just taken his revenge.

> *Hypocrisy had weighed on this man for thirty years. He was evil and he had shackled himself to goodness. He hated goodness with the hatred of a mismatched spouse. Underneath, he was a monster; the skin of a good man concealed the heart of a bandit. Virtue was for him a stifling thing.*
>
> *To be a hypocrite is to be a patient in both senses of the word: he waits for his triumph, and he suffers torture. The eternal premeditation of the cruel stroke, the constant need to put people off the scent, the impossibility of ever being oneself — these are exhausting.*
>
> *There are strange moments when the hypocrite thinks well of himself; within the phony there hides an enormous ego. The worm slithers like the dragon and rears up the same way that it does. A*

> *traitor is nothing than a failed despot who cannot attain his ends except as a lackey, a petty thing capable of enormities. The hypocrite is a dwarfed titan.*
>
> *The hypocrite, being wickedness complete, has within him both poles of perversity. He is a priest on one side and a courtesan on the other. His demoniacal sex is double. The hypocrite is a frightful hermaphrodite of evil.*
>
> *The peculiarity of hypocrisy is to be cruel in hope. The hypocrite is someone who waits. Hypocrisy is nothing other than a terrible hopefulness, and this lie founds itself on a virtue turned vicious. Strange to say, in the hypocrite there is trust; the hypocrite trusts in that mysterious indifference of the unknown which allows for evil.*
>
> *In the hypocrite there is emptiness, or to speak more truly, the hypocrite himself is an emptiness.*

I only came to *Toilers of the Sea* looking for octopuses.[1] I had not really expected to take much interest in Hugo's writing as such; I had always found romantic authors of Hugo's type antipathetic, and I expected nothing more than standard average melodrama. But either I've changed, or I was wrong all along. I found Hugo's rambling, over-the-top, virtually

avant-garde excess almost hypnotic, and while I must reject his Manichaean view of the octopus, hypocrisy will never look the same to me again.

Note

1. "Octopus" (pl. "octopuses" or "octopodes"): Greek *polypodos*, Latin *polypi*, French *poulpe*. “Octopus” is a late Renaissance Latin coinage derived from Greek which has been borrowed by English, and is not the classical Greek or Latin name for the beast. And *octopi* is *wrong; octopodes* would be the best classical plural.

http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/000813.html

The etymology of hypocrisy

My puzzlement over the hypocritical octopus and the hypocritical ocean wave in Victor Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* led me to an etymological investigation of the words "hypocrite" and "hypocrisy" (*hypocrisie*) in English, French, Latin, and Greek (but not Hebrew, it turns out.) This is may be my least interesting chapter ever.

The word "hypocrite" and its derivatives trace back to the Greek. Neither the word nor the concept is found in Hebrew. This word does not appear in the Septuagint, the favored Greek translation of the Tanakh (the Old Testament), though it does appear in a Theodotion's translation. When the word "hypocrite" is seen in the KJV translation of the Old Testament it translates, and probably mistranslates a Hebrew word that normally just means "godless person", someone who defies God.

In classical Greek the word "hypocrite" means someone who is acting as or pretending to be someone else. It can have a negative meaning, as in the case of fraud and imposture, or a more neutral one, as in the case of stage actors and public spokesmen. This word appears many times in the Greek New Testament, often in the words of Christ. This is problematic, since Jesus did not speak Greek and there is no apparent Aramaic or Hebrew

equivalent of the word. In only one New Testament case does this word clearly have its classical Greek meaning of "pretending". In the others (and in the exceptional Jewish translation mentioned above) the Greek word seems to have acquired an additional meaning beyond just feigning and dissimulation, something more like "evil". Furthermore, as often as this word is used in the New Testament and in the words of Christ, unless the Greek version is completely fictitious it would seem that some version or equivalent of the word must have crept into Aramaic.

Perhaps the Greek word had evolved between Classical and Biblical Greek. Conjecturally, if "hypocrisy" in the sense of "feigning" had come to be used mostly in cases when evil people were feigning goodness, then "evil" might have become part of the definition; "pretending to be good, but really evil inside" might have become the primary meaning of the word. However the restricted "feigning" meaning probably never quite disappeared — Godefroy cites an instance from Old French.

It seems pretty clear that the common European meaning of the word is derived (via the Latin Vulgate) from Biblical rather than classical Greek, though some scholarly writers may have occasionally deliberately reverted to the classical meaning. One source claims that the word came to English via Molière's play *Tartuffe, ou*

le Hypocrite, and while this is not true and is off by many centuries, it's possible that in English the limited Tartuffian sense became dominant while the broader meaning survived only in France.

Even so, Hugo's application of the word "hypocrite" to an octopus pretending to be a rock and to an innocent-seeming but lethal ocean wave seems like quite a stretch. But then Hugo, being Hugo, could get away with anything.

Sources

Littré: "hypocrisie", sense #3

Hypocrisie se prend quelquefois dans un sens moins odieux, surtout dans le style léger, pour désigner en un moment donné l'affectation de sentiments qu'on n'éprouve pas.

Reverso online translating dictionary

Synonymes:

Adjectif singulier*: doucereux, mielleux, fourbe, cauteleux (vieilli) chafouin, jésuitique, patelin, grimacier (vieilli) papelard (vieilli) pharisien, matois, insinuant, rusé, cagot, félon, insincère*.

Nom: *tartufe, matois, fourbe, escobar, judas, sainte-nitouche, simulatrice, pharisienne, pharisien, menteur, cafard.*

CNRTL Dictionnaire du Moyen Français
I....- *[D'une attitude (personnifiée)]: Faulse beaulté [m'amye] qui tant me couste chier, Rude en effect, ypocrite doulceur.... (VILLON, Test. R.H., 1461-1462, 83).*

II. - *Empl. subst.: L'ENNEMY. Or vous tien je pris en mes laz, Murtrier, mauvais, non pas hermittes, Mais luxurieux ypocrites (Mir. st J. Paulu, c.1372, 116). Qui feit aux ypocrites servir saintement Dieu par grant peine et labeur en jeunes, en oyant messes, en voyages, en voulans a tous complaire, et par ce en estant de tous serfs en foles largesces? Certes toutes ces choses et autres innumerables fait amour de vaine gloire. (GERS., Concept., 1401, 412). L'ypocrite pervers, de sa montagne descendu, luy mect son baston creux a l'oreille. [Un ermite luxurieux abuse de la crédulité d'une vieille femme pour séduire sa fille, en se présentant comme un envoyé de Dieu] (C.N.N., c.1456-1467, 102). Or entendez la deception mauvaise et horrible traïson que ces faulx ypocrites pourchasserent a ceulx et celles qui tant de biens (...) leur faisoient. (C.N.N., c.1456-1467, 216).*

Étymol. et Hist. *1176 adj. ipocrite (Chr. de Troyes, Cligès, éd. A. Micha, 3046). Empr. au b. lat. hypocrita « hypocrite » (lat. imp. « mime [qui accompagnait l'acteur avec des gestes]) », gr. ὑποκριτής « celui qui distingue, explique, interprète; acteur; fourbe, hypocrite ».*

Godefroy, *Lexique De 'Ancien Français*:

Hypocriser: v.n. faire l'hypocrite ||v.a. déguiser, dénaturer par hypocrisie, feindre hypocritement || v. refl. devenir hypocrite.
Hypocrisesse: s.f., hypocrisie.
Hypocrisie: s.f. déguisement.

English etymology of "hypocrite":

Early 13c., from O.Fr. ypocrite (Mod.Fr. hypocrite), from Church L. hypocrita, from Gk. hypokrites "stage actor, pretender, dissembler," from hypokrinesthai (see hypocrisy).

hypocrisy*: Early 13c., from O.Fr. ypocrisie, from L.L. hypocrisis, from Gk. hypokrisis "acting on the stage, pretense," from hypokrinesthai "play a part, pretend," also "answer," from hypo- "under" (see sub-) + middle voice of krinein "to sift, decide" (see crisis).*

English etymology of "hypocrite" #2:

(Only interesting because it traces the word back no farther than Molière's play.)

E-Bible etymology of "hypocrite"

HYPOCRISY, HYPOCRITE. In the context of Gr. Drama the term hypocrite was applied to an actor on the theater stage. Since an actor pretends to be someone other than himself, hypocrites was applied metaphorically to a person who "acts a part" in real life, pretending to be better than he actually is, one who simulates goodness. In secular Gr. Literature, therefore, hypocrites may be either neutral or undesirable. In the NT, however, it is always undesirable, signifying one who works a deception by feigned piety.

This concept of pretended goodness was foreign to OT thought. The Heb. Root h-n-p, translated "hypocrisy" or "hypocrite" in the KJV, was translated in the LXX [Septuagint--Greek translation of the Old Testament] by anomos, "lawless," "criminal," or "godless," parallel to poneros, "an evil doer" (Isa 9:17); and by asebes, "godless," "irreverent" (Isa 33:14).In the book of Job it is clear that the hanep is one radically opposed to God, one who forgets God (Job 8:13;

15:34-35; 20:5; 27:8). The verb hanep means to pollute or corrupt (cf. Num 35:33; Ps 106:38; Isa 24:5; Jer 3:1). Theodotion's translation of Job, later incorporated into the LXX, rendered Heb. hanep as hypocrites in two verses (Job 34:30; 36:13). Thus it seems that Greek-speaking Jews were employing hypokrisis in another sense in addition to its metaphorical meaning of feigning to be what one is not.

....“Hypocrite” occurs 18 times and “hypocrisy” twice in the words of Jesus. He warned His disciples of “the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Lk 12:1). He diagnosed them as appearing righteous to men, but being full of hypocrisy and iniquity within (Mt 23:28). That He accused the Pharisees of more than mere pretending is suggested by the parallels to the reading “their hypocrisy” in Mk 12:15. In Mt 22:18 it is “their wickedness” or malice, and in Lk 20:23 it is “their craftiness.” Only in Lk 20:20 does the verb hypokrino retain the original Gr. meaning of pretending: the scribes and chief priests, attempting to arrest Jesus, sent spies “who pretended to be sincere” (RSV).

Outside the Gospels hypokrisis occurs three times. Paul rebuked Peter for “dissimulation,” his deliberate inconsistency of first eating with Gentile converts at Antioch and then, fearing the

circumcision party, refusing to associate with them further (Gal 2:13, verb and noun)–and this following God's vision to Peter prior to his visiting Cornelius (Acts 10). Paul reveals that in the last times there will be those who follow evil spirits and doctrines of demons and speak lies in hypocrisy (1Tim 4:1-2). The Christian himself is warned to get rid of all hypocrisy in his life (1 Pet 2:1).

See: http://haquelebac.wordpress.com/2010/03/29/the-etymology-of-hypocrisy/

The Monster

He said that he had never been ill, that he had never caught anything, that he had never suffered from anything except an anthrax, a carbuncle on his back which kept him indoors for seventeen days. After which, to use his expression, he had been cauterized and nothing could affect him, neither heat nor cold nor drenching rain. He had the impression that he was invulnerable.

Goncourts, p. 228.

It seems that the night before Hugo's funeral, that night of a nation's sorrowful wake, was celebrated by a wholesale copulation, a priapic orgy, with all the prostitutes of Paris on holiday from their brothels, coupling with all and sundry on the lawns of the Champs-Elysees -- republican marriages which the good-natured police treated with becoming respect.

Goncourts, p. 307.

Prolific and versatile, Victor Hugo could write poetry in his sleep. He trusted his voice absolutely, and never looked back. He could change political positions twice in a few weeks without diminishing his passion. The artistic dabblings of his idle moments were (rightly) admired by Delacroix. Even today the Vietnamese Cao Dai sect regards him as a god, and in the rather short

international succession of humanist Popes he followed Voltaire and Goethe (as he himself claimed) and preceded Tolstoy. And all that without any help whatsoever from sublimated desire.

When Hugo published his first book Baudelaire was an infant, and when Baudelaire died Hugo was still going strong. Even Rimbaud only outlived him by a few years, and when Rimbaud quit writing at age 22, Hugo was still cranking it out. Hugo's three big novels have been made into hundreds of movies and plays in more than ten languages, and a century and a half later they remain middlebrow, vulgar, and popular. Hugo distorts the geology of French literature like an unexplainable erratic. He used up all the oxygen; whether they knew it or not, during the nineteenth century all the other French authors were writing against him. Hugo was the god of Sartre's Teutonic grandfather, and Sartre (in competition with his Teutonic cousin, Albert Schweitzer) did what he could to insert himself into Hugo's humanist succession.

It's a damn shame I can't read him. And me an expert on 19th century French literature!

Note

In 1900 my Iowa grandfather (for reasons which should be obvious) could think of no better name for his stud bull than "Victor Hugo".

Krakens, Basilisks, Clam-monsters

In his book *Mirages on the Sea of Time* Edward Schafer describes a monstrous mollusc with many of the traits of Hugo's horrible octopus:

> *In imaginative literature, particularly, but also in some soberer sources, the* ch'en 蜃 *mollusc acquired more extravagant attributes. It was transformed into a monster lurking in dark lairs — mysterious submarine grottoes — where it assimilated some of the traits of a sea-dragon, frothing at its ambiguous mouth and belching bubbles into the world of man, in a way somewhat reminiscent of the occidental dragon crouched over its kingly hoard and spouting puffs of smoke and fire:*
>
> *"He worked his jowls and dripped saliva, gaping and sucking, so that people took him to be a veritable sea-basilisk* [kraken, giant squid] *or dragon-clam* [clam-monster]*".*
>
> Edward Schafer, *Mirages on the Sea of Time*, p. 81.

Oddly, this mythical creature (like the dragon "hid in the deep", of which it may be a prototype or relative) is not regarded as evil. It's merely one of the strange

creatures living in an undersea Taoist fairyland corresponding to the terrestrial Kun Lun Mountain fairyland, and its most prominent power is the creation of the strange nautical mirages or *fata morganas* which sometimes confuse sailors. Schafer speaks of it as a kind of clam, but it behaves more like a cephalopod, and Schafer probably should have treated it as one (or perhaps, since it's mythical, as a hybrid clam-squid).

Whether the Taoist clam monsters have anything to do with the thetan clams who have left bivalve engrams deep in our psyches is unknown to me.

Aristotle on Mollusc Sex and the ignoble sciences

So protracted was [Darwin's] barnacle study that his children assumed it was the normal occupation of every father: When one of Darwin's young sons visits a neighbor's home, he asks his friend there, "Where does your father work on his barnacles?"

Rebecca Stott, *Darwin and the Barnacle*

Aristotle usually figures in cultural history and in the history of science as a rationalist philosophizer, one of the men who put The West on the non-empirical, non-experimental, unscientific track of logical abstraction and argument -- someone whose influence had to be thrown off before science would be possible.

This picture is really quite misleading. Aristotle was criticized in his own time for undignified activities such as the dissection of hermit crabs, and his biological writings show us that as an experimentalist he wasn't as far removed from Darwin as people think.

To make my point, I've excerpted Aristotle's writings on the sex lives of the mollusks -- since you can hardly imagine a less-dignified area of empirical study. After these passages I quote Aristotle's more general

justification of his study of ignoble things -- things "accessible to knowledge" even though not "excellent beyond compare and divine".

Among the ancients, even Plato has Parmenides point out that the Forms are to be found even in ignoble things like mud and hair -- though he did not go as far as Chuang Tzu and say "in piss and shit". Reading Aristotle here, it's hard not to conclude that some extraneous influence (presumably the Christians or the Romans) interrupted the development of Western science after Aristotle's death, postponing its fruition for almost 2000 years

Aristotle on the Sex Lives of Molluscs
tr. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson
Part 6

> *Mollusks, such as the octopus, the sepia, and the calamary, have sexual intercourse all in the same way; that is to say, they unite at the mouth, by an interlacing of their tentacles. When, then, the octopus rests its so-called head against the ground and spreads abroad its tentacles, the other sex fits into the outspreading of these tentacles, and the two sexes then bring their suckers into mutual connexion.*
>
> *Some assert that the male has a kind of penis in*

one of his tentacles, the one in which are the largest suckers; and they further assert that the organ is tendinous in character, growing attached right up to the middle of the tentacle, and that the latter enables it to enter the nostril or funnel of the female.

Now cuttle-fish and calamaries swim about closely intertwined, with mouths and tentacles facing one another and fitting closely together, and swim thus in opposite directions; and they fit their so-called nostrils into one another, and the one sex swims backwards and the other frontwards during the operation. And the female lays its spawn by the so-called 'blow-hole'; and, by the way, some declare that it is at this organ that the coition really takes place.....

Part 18

..... Some fifty days later, the eggs burst and the little polypuses creep out, like little spiders, in great numbers; the characteristic form of their limbs is not yet to be discerned in detail, but their general outline is clear enough. And, by the way, they are so small and helpless that the greater number perish; it is a fact that they have been seen so extremely minute as to be absolutely without organization, but nevertheless when touched they moved.

Crustaceans, then, hatch their eggs by brooding over them as they carry them about beneath their bodies; but the octopus, the sepia, and the like hatch their eggs without stirring from the spot where they may have laid them, and this statement is particularly applicable to the sepia; in fact, the nest of the female sepia is often seen exposed to view close in to shore. The female octopus at times sits brooding over her eggs, and at other times squats in front of her hole, stretching out her tentacles on guard.

Aristotle justifies biology and other forms of empirical study

Of things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are excellent beyond compare and divine, but less accessible to knowledge. The evidence that might throw light on them, and on the problems which we long to solve respecting them, is furnished but scantily by sensation; whereas respecting perishable plants and animals we have abundant information, living as we do in their midst, and ample data may be collected concerning all their various kinds, if only we are willing to take sufficient pains.

Both departments, however, have their special charm. The scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us, from their excellence, more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live; just as a half glimpse of persons that we love is more delightful than a leisurely view of other things, whatever their number and dimensions. On the other hand, in certitude and in completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage. Moreover, their greater nearness and affinity to us balances somewhat the loftier interest of the heavenly things that are the objects of the higher philosophy.

Having already treated of the celestial world, as far as our conjectures could reach, we proceed to treat of animals, without omitting, to the best of our ability, any member of the kingdom, however ignoble. For if some have no graces to charm the sense, yet even these, by disclosing to intellectual perception the artistic spirit that designed them, give immense pleasure to all who can trace links of causation, and are inclined to philosophy. Indeed, it would be strange if mimic representations of them were attractive, because they disclose the mimetic skill of the painter or sculptor, and the original realities themselves were

not more interesting, to all at any rate who have eyes to discern the reasons that determined their formation.

We therefore must not recoil with childish aversion from the examination of the humbler animals. Every realm of nature is marvellous: and as Heraclitus, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in that kitchen divinities were present, so we should venture on the study of every kind of animal without distaste; for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful. Absence of haphazard and conduciveness of everything to an end are to be found in Nature's works in the highest degree, and the resultant end of her generations and combinations is a form of the beautiful.

If any person thinks the examination of the rest of the animal kingdom an unworthy task, he must hold in like disesteem the study of man. For no one can look at the primordia of the human frame-blood, flesh, bones, vessels, and the like-without much repugnance. Moreover, when any one of the parts or structures, be it which it may, is under discussion, it must not be supposed that it is its

material composition to which attention is being directed or which is the object of the discussion, but the relation of such part to the total form. Similarly, the true object of architecture is not bricks, mortar, or timber, but the house; and so the principal object of natural philosophy is not the material elements, but their composition, and the totality of the form, independently of which they have no existence.

A Naïve Reading of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*

Rene Descartes, tr. Clarke, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*.

Descartes' brisk and bristly *Discourse* is not often read as literature, but it should be. Descartes has a gift for malicious understatement:

> *Everyone thinks that they are well endowed with common sense, so that even those who are most difficult to please do not usually wish to have more than they already possess* (p. 5)....
>
> *Philosophy provides us ways of speaking plausibly about everything, and of making oneself admired by those who are less educated....* (p. 8).

Descartes wrote in the shadow of the Inquisition, which had only recently threatened Galileo, and the *Discourse* is thickly studded with professions of orthodoxy and humility –every bold statement can be matched by a humble one. But Descartes also wrote in Holland, the homeland of tolerance, and his evasions are so transparent and blatant that they almost amount to taunting. (Straussians do not really have to do much work to spot most of the places where the intended meaning might be different than the apparent meaning, since Descartes usually tips his hand when he is making prudent concessions to orthodoxy.)

The basic "Cartesian" philosophical principles are well known: mind-body dualism, a kind of idealism, a version of the ontological proof of the existence of God, rationalism, and the analytic method of working from the part to the whole. And that's all there in the *Discourse,* but in a such a sketchy form that it doesn't seem like philosophy at all -- mixed in with general reflections on scientific procedure and a lot of autobiography showing us how he came to his conclusions.

The metaphysical, philosophical part is limited to the six pages of part four, and to me it seems to be, by far, the weakest, least interesting part of the book. Starting from supposed universal skepticism, in a single page (pp. 24-5), he question-begs his way from a proof that he himself exists, to a proof that God exists, then picking up somewhere the criterion that clear and distinct ideas must be true, digging up ideas of substance and perfection from somewhere or another, so that if he has a clear idea of his own imperfection, some perfect being must exist somewhere, and he himself must be a "thinking substance": *cogito, ergo sum* (pp. 25, 27).[1]

Similarly, there's no evidence that Descarte's claim that animals are simply material automatons without reason (whereas humans are inexplicable dualist material-spiritual beings) is based on any serious observation of animals; it seems also to be merely a concession to doctrine and a convenient way of evading certain difficulties (pp. 34, 42, 41.) Knowing that

Descartes was, as he clearly stated, was always looking over his shoulder at the Inquisition, it makes sense to think that these sloppy passages are not his serious work, but just patchworks intended to keep their author out of trouble. Descartes' metaphysical system, as opposed to his scientific and mathematical work, should thus be thought of as his less important accomplishment, a relapse or infection of scholasticism.

Descartes throughout is contemptuous of doctrine based on close readings of authoritative texts, and perhaps we should consider the following passage also to be a warning against the claim that there is such a things as "Cartesianism":

> *At this point I want to plead here with future generations never to believe something if they are told it originated from me, when I have not published it myself....For it seems to me that people also go back down again – that is, they in some way make themselves less wise than if they had abstained from study – who, not content with knowing everything that is intelligibly explained in their author, wish to find in them, over and above that, the solution to other problems about which the author says nothing and about which they may never have thought.* (p. 49).

The *Discourse* is autobiographical (*"I am proposing this work merely as a history or, if you prefer, a fable,",* p. 7), and tells us that Descartes' work is almost

a *bildungsroman* telling of his *Wanderjahre*. Already well educated by the standards of his time, Descartes resolved to continue his studies outside learned society:

> *I resolved to completely give up the humanities and, resolving not to search for any other science apart from what could be found in myself or in the great book of the world, I spent the remainder of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, meeting people of different temperaments and rank, acquiring different experiences, testing myself in meetings that came my way by chance....It seemed to me that I could find out much more truth in the reasoning that each person does about things that are important to them, and which have harmful consequences for them if they misjudge, than those made by a scholar in their study about speculative matters which have no consequences and whose only effect on them, perhaps, is that the further removed they are from common sense the more vain they will be about them, because they would have to use so much more ingenuity and skill in trying to make them plausible* (p. 10).
>
> *During the following nine years I did nothing other than wander around the world, trying to be a spectator rather than an actor in the dramas that unfold there"* (p. 22).[2]

The *Discourse* was not intended as a free-standing work, but was the theoretical and methodological preface to 500 dense pages on optics, astronomy, and geometry which almost no one reads any more, since their results have been incorporated into the modern sciences Descartes helped found. The most interesting parts of the book are the description of a systematic scientific method, which doesn't seem terribly exciting unless you remind it yourself that it once was new and not just an institutional practice.

Descartes' six rules of investigative procedure (p. 16) are the most celebrated, but scattered through the book are other important points, including a definition of independent variables (p. 46), a job description for lab techs (p. 51), a proposal for criticism and peer review (p. 52), and a number of interesting comments on the social vs. the individual aspects of scientific activity -- which is best done under one man's command but is always too large for one individual to complete (pp. 46, 52). Descartes had initially done his research almost in secret, and had resisted writing anything down or trying to communicate his ideas. He initially decided to write in order to find collaborators, when he found that the task he had undertaken was too large for one man (p. 46.)

But once he had begun to do this, he realized that publication has an additional advantage:

> *But in the meantime, I have had other reasons that made me change my mind and believe that I should*

> *continue to write everything that I judged to be in some way significant as I discovered the truth about it, and that I should take as much care as if I planned to publish such writings. The reason is to have more time to study them properly, as one undoubtedly always examines more closely what one believe should be seen by many others than what one does only for oneself, and because it has often happened that things which seemed true to me, when I first thought about them, seemed false to me when I wished to write them down.* (p. 46)

According to the canned history Descartes was a rationalist, but his description of his wandering years sounds empiricist, and he also writes a pragmatist passage:

> *In place of the speculative philosophy taught in the schools, it is possible to find a practical philosophy .... and thereby make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature. This is desirable not only for the discovery of an infinite number of devices that would enable us to enjoy, without any effort, the fruits of the earth and all the good we find there, but also, especially, for the preservation of health....*" (p. 44)

And there is even a page of "progressive education":

> *Besides, the habit they will acquire by searching initially for easy things [i.e., Descartes' early results, which Descartes proposes that his students work out for themselves] and moving gradually to more difficult ones will be more useful to them than all my instructions. Just as, for my own part, I am convinced that I had been taught from my youth all the truths the demonstrations of which I have been searching for since then, and if I had learned them without effort, I might not have got to know any others...."* (p. 50)

The Descartes that my naïve reading has found is very different than the Descartes I've read about in history of philosophy, but it's all there in the text. Have I found "the real Descartes", to replace the erroneous Descartes they tell us about? I doubt it, since I've deliberately left a lot out (just as the received version does). What I've done is pay special attention to the "unphilosophical" parts which comprise most of the *Discourse*.

As is usually the case with founders, Descartes was much more diverse and also more practical than his followers portrayed him to be. He developed a unique mix of extreme prudence and extreme boldness. His method really involved rejecting most of the cultural and intellectual world of his day, but he always piously

affirmed a contentless orthodoxy. He was primarily a great scientist, and he had a lot to say about the methods and organization of scientific research and the relation of scientific knowledge to the conventional beliefs of everyday life.

To my mind, Descartes' idealism, universal skepticism, and trust in clear and distinct inborn ideas lead to a delusional metaphysic, but as the grounds for operating principles for scientific research, they offer an escape both from Church doctrine and from from the kind of inconclusive humanistic mumbling around in erudite complexities characteristic of Robert Burton or (less so) Montaigne.[3] It allowed him, on the one hand, to detach himself from the welter of immediate impressions ("the senses") and on the other to zero in on simple ("clear and distinct") mathematical controlling factors not immediately evident to observers of seemingly-complex phenomena.[4]

As for Descartes' religion, St. Augustine himself ridicules the childish idea that God is an old man with a white beard up in Heaven, and calls God a "spiritual substance". However, the God of the Old Testament, and the God of most believers as well, seems more like the childish version of God (and a harsh version indeed). Augustine's definition, and Descartes', both give you something you can call "God", but do these abstract Gods have anything to do with the God(s) actual people worship?

Notes

1. There is, in fact an alternative view of the *cogito*: to Buddhists, with their no-substance *anatman* view, it's a natural mistake of every *cogito* to conclude *ergo sum*, but it's a mistake which can be corrected. (In Buddhism, the Gods are the prime victims of this error, from which they can never escape – whereas men can).

Just as Plato proves the existence of the Forms by saying that without them we could know nothing, for Descartes truth proves God so that God can later prove truth (p. 28) -- later he speaks of "seeds of truth" planted in our heart by God which rescue us from universal skepticism (p. 45; also p. 35). He also pushes his dubious "clear and distinct idea" test for truth to the limit when he finds significance in the fact that we can imagine existing without a body (p. 28). If we mistrust our senses, why should we trust our mind's subjective power to imagine something or to clearly think it?

2. Twice in this autobiographical sketch Descartes mentions the "stove-heated room" where he formulated his basic research program one idle winter during his military service (pp. 11, 22). Forty years after first reading the Discourse all I remembered was that stove, together with the vague but accurate feeling that I had entirely missed the point of the book.

Oddly enough, in his discussion of the circulation of the blood, while Descartes describes the mechanical operations of the heart correctly (pp. 34-5), he also compares the heart to a stove which "heats up" the blood. He intuited that metabolism is a form of combustion and

produces heat, but had no idea what combustion was. He thought that heat was a kind of matter ("phlogiston", though I don't know if Descartes used that word) rather than a state of matter, and did not know how critical air was in the process (pp. 33, 35, 38, 39.) As powerful as the work of Descartes' and some of his physicist successors was, when you consider that their universal physics knew little or nothing about the way metabolism works, or what oxidation is, or what the source of the sun's heat is, the elevation of their work into a universal metaphysic by Voltaire and his cronies looks very wrong-headed.

3. I actually have an enormous admiration for Montaigne, who like *Laozi* is one of my patron saints, but his urbane skepticism was harmful in situations where precise knowledge was actually possible.

4. Descartes' presentation of his ideas as hypotheses -- pure fictions to be worked out abstractly and independently of observed reality, and only later to be checked against reality to see whether reality seems "as if" it had developed as the hypothesis supposes (pp. 31-32) -- sounds a lot like like "model-building". But it may have originated as just another way to keep the Inquisition quiet.

Descartes' dualism, also presumably intended as a way of maintaining orthodoxy, also may have had the effect of bracketing out the study of phenomena to which his determinist method was not well adapted, at the cost of perpetrating a metaphysical problem on future centuries. (e.g. p. 41, where language and freedom come to define the human soul.)

Staying at Home

Without leaving your room,
you can know the world.
Without looking outside,
you can know heaven's way.
The farther you travel,
the less you know.The wise man goes
nowhere, but knows;
is unseen, but famous;
does nothing, but succeeds.

Tao Te Ching, Ch. 47

Vous avez confirmé dans des lieux pleins d'ennui / Ce que Newton connut sans sortir de chez lui.

You have confirmed in the most boring places / what Newton knew without leaving home.

Voltaire, in Henri Poincare, *The Value of Science*

It is not worthwhile to go around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.

Thoreau, *Walden*, Ch. 18.

The *Tao Te Ching* is a Bible for me, and I am also a great admirer of Thoreau. These words of theirs favor quietness over rushing around, and thoughtfulness over the endless accumulation of data points -- and up to a point, my bias is like theirs. Nonetheless, the Voltaire citation (when put in context) shows what's wrong with this point of view.

Voltaire's dig was aimed at Maupertuis and the other French geodeticists, who traveled to Lapland and Ecuador to take measurements establishing the exact shape and size of the earth -- data necessary for the confirmation of Newton's gravitational theory, but also for the correction of out description of the not-quite-spherical earth. Voltaire's belief that these trips and measurements were unnecessary was the result of an age-old anti-empirical, theoreticist bias, a demand for authorities. Voltaire was a rationalist and thought that measurements were unnecessary, since Newton's theory old us what they would be. He was all wrong, of course; he was enshrining Newton as The One Who Knows in the same way that the medieval Church enshrined Aristotle.

The geodeticists' work was politically sensitive and involved adventures and mountaineering feats surpassing those of Indiana Jones -- one scientist was sentenced to death in Spain and had to escape via Algeria. Geodetics eventually came to be assigned to the French military, which played a role in scientific research well into the

twentieth century. Poincaré also tells us that the *Histoire du Docteur Akakia,* Voltaire's attack on Maupertuis (the first French Newtonian and an early mentor of his) was apparently motivated primarily by petty jealousies and court intrigue rather than anything serious. This particular feud with Maupertuis ultimately became entangled with a different feud between Maupertuis, Samuel König, and Leibniz, the last of whom was also simultaneously battling with Newton and Clarke over quite a different grievance. These episodes of early modern science tend to confirm Steve Shapin's observation that modern science was organized around the gentlemanly code of honor, contentious as it was, rather than on any sort of selfless or idealistic principle.

Studies of particulars (history, geography, philology) are infinitely more interesting than the fragile theoretical explanations we are bombarded with, and the fully-theorized studies (marginalist economics, analytic philosophy, "literary studies") have turned out abominably. As for myself, I no longer aspire to any scientific discovery at all, and just keep myself happy gathering bright shiny things and publishing them like this.

They don't make mathematicians the way they used to

The untutored thug mathematician in the movie Good Will Hunting was supposedly based on the self-taught Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, who did his first original work as a unknown in faraway Tamil Nadu. But for the thug part, Évariste Galois would have been a far better choice:

> *On the following Bastille Day, Galois was at the head of a protest, wearing the uniform of the disbanded artillery, and came heavily armed with several pistols, a rifle, and a dagger. For this, he was again arrested, this time sentenced to six months in prison for illegally wearing a uniform. He was released on April 29, 1832. During his imprisonment, he continued developing his mathematical ideas.*

--Wikipedia

Renaissance savages

> *They were simple people who gave way to their feelings. We repress ours.... (p. 100)*
>
> *Here, too, was the "underdevelopment of sight". He was content to "feel" — like his whole age (p. 454).*
>
> *The Problem of Unbelief in the 16th Century,* Lucien Febvre,.

Who was Febvre talking about? Martin Luther, and with him, the entire Renaissance: Erasmus, More, Montaigne, Pico, Rabelais, the whole shebang. This is from the *Annales* school's famous *histoire des mentalités.* Where did it come from?

> *A while ago our teacher Lévy-Bruhl investigated how and why primitives reasoned differently from civilized men. Yet a good part of the latter remained primitives for a long time* (p. 6).

But Levi-Bruhl was refuted by Lévi-Strauss, I am told, so there's no such thing as "*la mentalité primitive"* anywhere any more. And anyway, you're not supposed to talk about white people that way, as if Luther and Erasmus were wogs!

During the 19th century and first half of the 20th century French rationalism and scientism were savage and fierce. Febvre was diligently refuting an even more rationalistic earlier book by Abel Lefranc which had claimed that Rabelais was a pure rationalist centuries ahead of his time.

Renaissance Maoist

Kautsky has to confess that while "More's communism is modern in most of its tendencies," it is "unmodern in most of its expedients". Its "unmodern" expedients are...... the institution of compulsory bond labor and the "frugality of he Utopians", the "restriction of wants".

J. H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea*, pp. 66-7.

Communism means the raising of living standards [says Kosygin]. *Of course. And swimming is a way of putting on swimming trunks.*

Mao Zedong, interviewed by Malraux

At the time when Hexter was writing, most Communists were prophets of abundance, and for Westerners Mao Zedong was only a shadow on the horizon. Even in China full-bore Maoism was still in the future. But for Mao, abundance was a means and not an end, and like More, he only wanted as much abundance as was necessary.

The Swedish Rosicrucians

Susanah Akerman

It is generally though that the seventeenth century Swedish Rosicrucians -- allied with the Teutonic Knights and the Sword Brothers, and working in conjunction with the British poets Spenser and Sidney and the astronomers Tycho Brahe, and Johannes Kepler -- believed that with the appearance all in the same year of three comets, a planetary conjunction, a nova, several signifying herring, and a signifying garfish -- it would now be possible (with the help of occult alchemical, astrological, numerological, Pythagorean and Kabbalistic readings of the the biblical books of Ezekiel, Ezra, Daniel, and Revelation, the Gothic runes, the book of Enoch, and various Ethiopian, Coptic, Syriac, Greek and Hebrew prophesies, all of them interpreted in terms of Joachim de Fiore's three-stage millennial prophecy and the Sabéans' -- *not* Sabaeans' -- seven-stage millennial prophecy) to predict the appearance of the Lion of the North: an English, Scottish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Brandenburger, or Wittenburger Prince or King who would save Christendom from the Papist Whore of Satan and bring about the Third Elijah, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the Millennium.

But of course, it wasn't as simple as that.

The μακελοσ Queen

Susanna Akerman,
Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle

Queen Christina of Sweden, a serious coin collector, commissioned a series of 118 coins commemorating her life which she called her *histoire metallique (*though only 8 of them were actually struck before her abdication).

On one of them is a recognizable image of Christina wearing the helmet of Athena, the Athenian virgin goddess of wisdom. The logo on the reverse side, μακελοσ, puzzled classicists until they realized that it was the rendering in Greek letters of the Swedish word *makelos* , which means "peerless or unmatched", "unmarried", and perhaps (by a stretch) "undefeated".[1] In Middle English, and very likely also in Swedish, the word *makeles* is an epithet of the Virgin Mary:

I synge of a mayden
That is makeles:
Kyng of alle kynges
To hir son she ches.

Christina was without false modesty or, it would seem, any other kind.

Note

1. I am told that in German *makellos* means “unblemished”, “without stain”, “immaculate”, meanings I cannot find in English (*OED*) or Anglo-Saxon (Hall's *Concise AS Dictionary*). Etymologically this would a completely different word, from the Latin *macula*. The Virgin Mary was indeed immaculate, though the unstained sheets of the Immaculate Conception became dogma only fairly recently.

To see ourselves as others see us

The most important dumb Swede in American history was Chief Justice Earl Warren. In film, Sonja Henie was dumb, Greta Garbo was less dumb, and Ingrid Bergman was not dumb.

In general, Swedes are either madmen or dumb. Madness trumps dumbness — if a Swede is a madman, his dumbness is moot. Gaear Grimsrud in "Fargo" was probably both, but who knows?

> *Knowledge of other nations and peoples is so limited that wherever I have traveled in America the majority of Yankees have as a matter of course called all Scandinavians Swedes. If you live among them for a time, you discover readily, that as soon as you are called a Swede, it is in a pejorative sense, as if you really ought to beg their pardon for being a Swede. ....*
>
> Knut Hamsun, *The Cultural Life of Modern America*

> *They reckoned they were mighty slick,*
> *Them two tinhorns from Idaho;*
> *That poor dumb Swede could swing a pick,*
> *but that was all he'd ever know.*
>
> Robert Service, Dumb Swede

"What? You won't drink with me, you little dude! I'll make you then! I'll make you!" The Swede had grasped the gambler frenziedly at the throat, and was dragging him from his chair. The other men sprang up. The barkeeper dashed around the corner of his bar. There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

Stephen Crane, *The Blue Hotel*

"Yes, indeedy," added Kink. "We ain't in no charity business a-disgorgin' free an' generous to Swedes an' white men."

"Ay tank ve haf another drink," hiccoughed Ans Handerson, craftily changing the subject against a more propitious time.

Jack London, "Too Much Gold"

The mouth of that mine goes right into the face of a cliff, and they used to put us in a bucket and run us over on a trolley and shoot us into the shaft. The bucket traveled across a box canyon about three hundred feet deep and about a third full of water. Two Swedes had fell out of the bucket once, and hit

the water, feet down. If you'll believe it, they went to work the next day. You can't kill a Swede.

Willa Cather, <u>My Antonia</u>

"I didn't understand your home was North Dakota," said Mr. Thompson. "I thought you said Georgia."

"I've got a married sister in North Dakota," said Hatch "married to a Swede, but a white man if I ever saw one."

Katherine Anne Porter, *Noon Wine*

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

Ernest Hemingway, *The Killers*

He nodded. He felt as if everyone in the place knew him and were watching him, perhaps laughing behind his back, and thinking that all he could get for a dance was a dumb Swede pig.

James T. Farrell, *Studs Lonigan*

"The Swedes are overrunning the whole country. I bet there are more Swedes in the town of East Jolloppi than there are in the rest of the country....Stanley doesn't know the Swedes like we do... There's no way of stopping a Swede from doing what he sets his head to doing."

Erskine Caldwell, "A Country Full of Swedes"

Marry a Jew or a Chinaman or a Swede, it's all fine if you're prompted by any motive, including money, save that of guilt.

William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*

Dumb Swedes in real life

Vladimir Illych Lenin:

"You know, I could travel with the passport of a dumb Swede".

Sonja Henie (actually a Norwegian):

[Zanuck] found, for example, Sonja Henie on the ice-rink at the time when she was the world champion amateur skater. He signed her up without even giving her a screen test and

subsequently discovered, as he put it later, that "she was the original dumb Swede".

Greta (Gustafsson) Garbo:

Cortez believed that Torrent was HIS film and he resented Greta from the beginning. He felt himself a great star who must work with this 'dumb Swede'. On the set or off, he gave Garbo not the slightest notice. He decided that Garbo was a nonentity and treated her as such....

"She wants to buy whatever state that has no people in it and turn it into a wheat farm and raise wheat and children," John Gilbert later complained in an interview before he drank himself to death. "She keeps saying 'You're in love with Garbo the actress'. And I say 'You're damn right. I don't want to marry some dumb Swede and raise wheat and kids miles from civilization."

Earl Warren:

Thomas Dewey called Earl Warren *"That big dumb Swede". "To Judge Learned Hand, [Justice Warren] was just a big dumb Swede". Nixon: Warren's a dumb Swede."*

See also

Richard D. Beards, "Stereotyping in Modern American Fiction: Some Solitary Swedish Madmen." *Moderna Sprak,* 63 (1969): 329-37. (Unavailable on the net, to my knowledge. It's a damn shame). Outside American literature, the phrase "Swedish madman" (per Google) usually means the Swedish king Karl XII, but sometimes the dramatist August Strindberg or the scientist and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg. At least one Swedish madman is mentioned in Henning Mankell's *Daniel,* written in Swedish, and the Swede originally accused of murdering Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was often referred to as a solitary madman.

Roger McKnight, "Those Swedish Madmen Again: The Image of the Swede in Swedish-American Literature"*, Scandinavian Studies,* 56 #2, 1984, pp. 114-139. A response to Beards. Because Swedes, like most 19th-century Americans, were Northern European white Protestants, "*the Swede might stand out to the American as a quaint, strong, baffling, or alienated cousin".* (This is like the uncanny valley phenomenon, when robotic simulations of human beings are good enough to be unnerving, but not good enough to feel "right"). Discusses

Swedish characterizations of Swedish character and compares them to the American stereotypes, and discusses Swedish-American authors' responses to the stereotype. It turns out that Swedes do not think of themselves as dumb or as solitary madmen. (Unfortunately, many key citations in this paper are in Swedish.)

Stanley Wertheim, "Unravelling the Humanist: Stephen Crane and Ethnic Minorities", *American Literary Realism*, 30.3 (1998), 65-75. About Crane's negative attitude toward foreigners generally. Swedes are mentioned briefly in footnote #1, which cites Beards.

More documentation at http://haquelebac.wordpress.com/2011/01/25/katherine-anne-porter-noon-wine/)

Sexual Customs of the Icelanders

Pierre Bayle, tr. Popkin, *Historical and Critical Dictionary (Selections).*

According to Bayle (pp. 104-106), Blefkenius (a 16th century explorer) reported that young Icelandic women ("very beautiful but poorly dressed") offered travelers sexual hospitality much like the Babylonian temple prostitution reported by Herodotus. Marco Polo also reports this custom in two places he visited – a city in what is now Xinjiang, and a place which he calls Tibet. Blefkarius's report, however, was stoutly denied by Arngrimus Jonas, a coadjutor to the bishop of Iceland who, Bayle informs us, married a young woman when he was in his late 80s and lived well into his 90s.

In *The Fate of Shechem* Pitt Rivers discusses customs of this type, especially the sexual hospitality offered to the Pharoah and Abimelech by Abraham and Isaac, which was also discussed by Bayle. However, he emphasizes the nomadism of the early Hebrews, which was not a factor in the other cases.

Blefkenius also reported that it is forbidden to leave the table during Icelandic drinking bouts, so that young girls would bring chamber pots and hold them under the tables so that the celebrants could relieve themselves. Marco Polo reported a similar custom among the Rus, who during the 13th century were not as

different from Scandinavians as the Russians are today. And Kepler reported that the Dane Tycho Brahe's death at a drinking bout from an exploded bladder was the result of courtesy: "even though he felt the tension in his bladder increasing ….he put politeness before his health". (However, others have suggested that Brahe died because his fierce competitiveness).

Did Blefkarius plagiarize Polo, or were these actual Icelandic customs? If the stories were from Polo, Bayle didn't catch that; perhaps he hadn't read Polo, a non-classical author. The sexual-hospitality story resembles the timeless joke about the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter, and it may be that a certain kind of person (represented by Blefkarius, Polo, Herodotus, and Abimelech) makes sure to find this custom wherever he goes, whether it was already there or not.

We should also note that during this era blonde people were not necessarily "white". Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Battuta, and Marco Polo all describe both the pale northern peoples and the black Africans as lewd, filthy, superhumanly strong barbarians.

Appendix I:
Icelandic Sexual Dysfunction

"He is unable to consummate our marriage and give me satisfaction, although in ever other way he is as virile as the best of men", said Unn.

"What do you mean?" asked Mord. "Be more explicit".

Unn replied, Whenever he touches me, he is so enlarged that he cannot have the enjoyment of me, although we both passionately desire to reach consummation. But we have never succeeded. And yet, before we draw apart, he proves that he is by nature as normal as other men".

Njal's Saga, #7

Appendix II:
Marco Polo and Diversity

Marco Polo didn't really discover China. What he did discover was diversity, and he told you so:

Toutes gens que volés savoir les deverses jenerasions des homes et les deversités des deverse region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le feites lire. Et qui trovererés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et the grant diversités de la grande Harminie et de Persie et des Tartars et de Inde….

> Everyone who wants to know the diverse nations of men and the diversities of the diverse regions of the world, take this book and read it. And here you will find all of the greatest marvels and the great diversities of Greater Armenia and of Persia and of the Tartars and of India….
>
> *Marco Polo*, Chapter One, F text

The famous plagiarist Sir John Mandeville also featured diversity:

> *....and through many other isles that are about India, where dwell many divers kinds of folk of divers laws and shapes....*
>
> Sir John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, p. 44.*

A Frankish oaf becomes civilized, along with his wife

Bath attendant Sālim's story:

> *He looked and saw that I had recently shaved off my pubes. So he shouted "Sālim"! As I drew near him he stretched out his hand over my pubes and said, "Sālim, good! By the truth of my religion do the same for me." Saying this, he lay on his back and I found that in that place his hair was like his beard. So I shaved it off. Then he passed his hand over the place and, finding it smooth, he said, "Sālim, by the truth of my religion, do the same for Madame", referring to his wife. He then said to a servant of his, "Tell Madame to come here". Accordingly the servant went and brought her and made her enter the bath. She also lay on her back. The knight repeated, "Do what thou has done to me". So I shaved off all that hair while her husband was sitting looking at me. At last he thanked me and handed me the pay for my service.*

Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh, tr. Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades,* pp. 164-166.

Fucking Bears

"It's over, now," she told him. "It's over. You have to go to your place and I to mine." She sat up and put her sweater on.

He sat up across from her, rubbing his nose with a paw and looking confused. Then he looked down at himself. She looked as well. Slowly, Majestically his great cock was rising.

It was not like a man's, tulip-shaped. It was red, pointed, and impressive.

Marion Engle: *Bear*

"Look here", Ashenden said, "I'm a man and you're a bear. You're in rut. There are evidently no male bears here."

Stanley Elkin (an American author), *The Making of Ashenden*

These things always turn out badly, I've been told, but people always have to learn for themselves.

Keep it in your pants, Theodor

The illustration we give is a girl whose character of a "genuine liberal" stands out more clearly, since, according to the interviewer, "she is politically naive like the majority of our college women.... F515 is a 21 year old college student. She is a handsome brunette with dark, flashing eyes who exudes temperament and vitality. She has none of the pretty-pretty femininity so frequently seen in [racist] subjects, and would probably scorn the feminine wiles and schemes practiced by such women..... one senses in her a very passionate nature and so strong a desire to give intensely of herself in all her relationships that she must experience difficulty in restraining herself within the bounds of conventionality".[1]

Adorno contrasts the "Genuine Liberal" to such other less-desirable liberals as "Rigid non-racists" (Communists), "Protesting non-racists" (neurotic and frigid women), "Impulsive non-racists" (lesbians), and "Easygoing non-racists" (mellow airheads).

The Authoritarian Personality, abridged ed., pp. 383-4.

Note:
1. The description of the lovely F515 was the interviewer's, not Adorno's.

Counselor Beauvoir reports that her clients are adapted, normal, and well-adjusted.

> *She was well-adjusted to her life as a prostitute... She was mentally well-balanced, apart from this attitude.... Most prostitutes are morally adapted to their mode of life..... they feel integrated, and with reason, in a society that manifests a demand for their services.*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 628.

Oafs and Wimps

When I was young I was soft-hearted, and I was often offended by the way bullying authors used helpless minor characters as the butts of their jokes. Recently I took another look at some of the books that made me feel this way, and I found that there was a pattern. The characters being ridiculed were all, in one way or another, uncool. Two were wimpy librarians, two were oafs and klutzes, and one was just "awful" (a word Hemingway seems to use a lot).

Perhaps my soft-heartedness was not altruistic at all. Perhaps I was just looking at my own future, and realizing that at several key moments in my life I would suffer the bitter consequences of insufficient coolness. The oaf / wimp combination might seem unusual, but there's an explanation. In my early childhood I was a wimp and was bullied by my oafish friends, but by the age of about fourteen, by dint of hard work and determination, I had succeeded in meeting the minimum local oaf standard, and so when I went out into the great world, an oaf was what I was perceived to be.

So let's get down to cases.

1. Melville's address to the sub-sub librarians of the world, expressed in a tone of mock sympathy, struck me as unnecessarily mean:

The pale Usher-- threadbare in coat, heart, body, and brain; I see him now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality. So fare thee well, poor devil of a Sub-Sub, whose commentator I am. Thou belongest to that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this world will ever warm; and for whom even Pale Sherry would be too rosy-strong; but with whom one sometimes loves to sit, and feel poor-devilish, too; and grow convivial upon tears; and say to them bluntly, with full eyes and empty glasses, and in not altogether unpleasant sadness- Give it up, Sub-Subs! For by how much more pains ye take to please the world, by so much the more shall ye for ever go thankless! Would that I could clear out Hampton Court and the Tuileries for ye! But gulp down your tears and hie aloft to the royal-mast with your hearts; for your friends who have gone before are clearing out the seven-storied heavens, and making refugees of long pampered Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, against your coming. Here ye strike but splintered hearts together- there, ye shall strike unsplinterable glasses! -

Melville here was presumably exorcising his own inner pedant, like Norman Mailer killing off the bad, whiny Jew Roth in *The Naked in the Dead* -- but still, this is just mean.

2. In *The Revolt of the Angels,* Anatole France is beastly to Monsieur Sarette, an impoverished schoolmaster who had become the librarian of the quaint 350,000-volume library of an old aristocratic family. Sarette had devised a shelving and cataloging system so complicated that no one but him could ever find a book there, and because he had made it his goal to preserve the library intact, he refused ever to lend out a book out -- even to the library's owners. Granted, he was a silly old fool, but France punished him by having his library taken over by a band of rebel angels who strewed his precious books all around the library every night -- and even left inkstains on some of them. When M. Sarette finally stakes out the library one night, he is physically attacked and knocked unconscious, and ultimately he is driven mad and locked up in an asylum.

> *Monsieur Sarette loved his library. He loved it with a jealous love. He was there every day at seven o'clock in the morning busy cataloging at a huge mahogany desk. The slips in his handwriting filled an enormous case standing by his side surmounted by a plaster bust of Alexandre d'Esparvieu..... the borrowing of the smallest book seemed like dragging his heart out. To refuse a volume even to*

*such as had the most incontestable right to it, Monsieur Sarette would invent countless far-fetched or clumsy fibs.... Sometimes he woke at night bathed in sweat, and uttering a cry of fear because he had dreamed he had seen a gap on one of the shelves of his bookcases. It seemed to him a monstrous, unheard-of, and most grievous thing that a volume should leave its habitat.....*Chapter 2

When he awoke the fire was out, the lamp was extinguished, leaving an acrid smell behind. But all around, the darkness was filled with milky brightness and phosphorescent light. He thought he saw something flutter on the table. Stricken to the marrow with cold and terror, but upheld by a resolve stronger than any fear, he rose, approached the table, and passed his hands over the cloth. He saw nothing; even the lights faded, but under his fingers he felt a folio wide open; he tried to close it, the book resisted, jumped up and hit the imprudent librarian three blows on the head. Monsieur Sarette fell down unconscious. (Chapter 4).

France should have been able to make his big literature-of-ideas points without being quite so nasty to poor Sarette, who hardly deserved to be treated as though he were a real villain.

3. The book *Zuleika Dobson* is about Cool. For compelling coolness-reasons which cannot be expressed in human language, every man at Oxford was in love with Zuleika, and in the end they all committed suicide for love of her. Even the pitiful and mediocre Noaks presumes to fall in love with Zuleika -- though he did not have the courage to die. At one point, as a token of his love, he even offered her his iron ring (reputed to ward off rheumatism). To his astonishment, she accepted it, for mysterious Zuleika reasons which we will never understand. But this moment of good luck just draws our (and his) attention even more sharply to his wretched uncoolness (of which we have already been informed at his every appearance), and in the end, he is very firmly put in his place.

Here's Noaks:

> *He wore a black jacket, rusty and amorphous. His trousers were too short, and he himself was too short: almost a dwarf. His face was as plain as his gait was undistinguished. He squinted behind spectacles....*
>
> *Little Noaks was squatting in the front row, peering up at her through his spectacles....*
>
> *Zuleika: "As for you, little Sir Lily Liver, leaning out there, and, I frankly tell you, looking like nothing so much as a gargoyle hewn by a drunken*

stone-mason for the adornment of a Methodist Chapel in one of the vilest suburbs of Leeds or Wigan, I do but felicitate the river-god and his nymphs that their water was saved to-day by your cowardice from the contamination of your plunge."

At the time I read *Zuleika Dobson*, I was bespectacled and short. Probably I should just have declared my conflict of interest right then and there and moved on, rather than forming an opinion of the book -- an opinion which was, under the circumstances, almost certain to be unfair.

4. *The Sun Also Rises.* When I first read this book, I never did understand what was so awful about Cohn. I understand better now: he was just plain uncool. He cared too much, and in the wrong way, about Hadley -- the psycho bitch from hell who keeps things hopping throughout. Cohn had studied boxing in order to avoid being bullied, and he was able to whip up on guys who gave him trouble or who got in his way. But he fought in a scientific, Jewish way, not in a cool way, and he cared too much about winning. Just plain *awful.*

"Didn't you send him with a letter to me in New York last winter? Thank God, I'm a traveling man. Haven't you got some more Jewish friends you

could bring along?" He rubbed his chin with his thumb, looked at it, and then started scraping again.

"You've got some fine ones yourself."

"Oh, yes. I've got some darbs. But not alongside of this Robert Cohn. The funny thing is he's nice, too. I like him. But he's just so awful."

"He can be damn nice."

"I know it. That's the terrible part."

5. Finally, Charles Bovary. Charles never seemed like that bad a guy to me. I thought that the ridicule he faced on his first day of school (and afterwards) was unfair. He was guilty of wearing an impossibly funny hat, which Flaubert spends half a page describing. Like M. Sarette, Charles was guilty of playing dominoes. Like Noaks, Charles was guilty of being an impoverished, reasonably diligent, but untalented student. He was doomed from the start. When towards the end he wanted to dance with his wife Emma, she talked him out of it with the same sarcastic incredulity with which Noaks' elegant roommate dismisses the idea that Noaks might actually have fallen in love.

Every guy I knew growing up was a Charles Bovary. My dad was a Charles Bovary. I wasn't going to have to marry any of them, so I liked them all fine. I am somewhat of a Charles Bovary myself. His big country wedding sounded like an enhanced version of the kind of weddings we had where I grew up -- a lot of fun, really.

Gautier's Hippo, Baudelaire's Goony-bird, Rimbaud's Dancing Bear

"I pocketed a large number of zwanziger and the assemblage seemed more than satisfied with my circus dog tricks."

Franz Liszt, in Beth Archer Brombert's *Cristina: Portrait of a Princess,* p. 349.

[Young Liszt was angered] by the unwritten code according to which musicians were only admitted to the finest French salons by the servant's entrance.

George Sand, Curtis Cate, p. 408.

Then Gautier sat down in a little armchair close to the Princess's skirts, like a poor, tired court jester.

Goncourts, p. 143

Manet even gave as a reason for not exhibiting that he could not afford to commit himself alongside Cezanne, who was thought of as a little freakish even by those other members who sensed

his strength. And Cezanne gave them plenty of reason for feeling so. He was rough in manner, sometimes surly, always unsure of himself, and defensively contemptuous of fine manners.

http://www.wetcanvas.com/Museum/Artists/c/Paul_Cezanne/student.html

The older Flaubert gets, the more provincial he becomes.

Goncourts, p. 202

With a few exceptions the great poets and artists of 19th century France, even the famous ones, were of ambiguous social status. Few were rich, many were rather poor, and only a few were of aristocratic birth. Many of them either had to support themselves by hack journalism or else depended on what amounted to charity from wealthy patrons. For all their snobbery, high aspirations and pride, they were not really respectable, and most of them were well aware of this. Gautier, Rimbaud, and even the fastidious Baudelaire all embodied their social uneasiness in images of the oaf.

Théophile Gautier knew everyone and played a major role in the French cultural life of the mid-XIXc. Like Nerval he can be thought of as a link between the Romantics and the Symbolists and a precursor of Baudelaire and the Parnassians, and he was taken as a

model by Pound and Eliot. He advocated art for art's sake (with no "message") and a pure, rather impersonal poetry written in difficult forms. His declaration that "Imagination is the one weapon in the war against reality" still sounds contemporary. By and large, however, he was eclipsed by more the vivid poets (and more realistic authors of fiction) who followed in his footsteps, and he is unfortunately remembered nowadays, at least by French 101 students, mostly for his programmatic poem "*L'art*", part of the canned history of French poetry manifestos which culminates in Dada and Surrealism.

Photographs of the esthete Gautier show a blocky, surly fellow with long unkempt hair. These pictures made me feel that Gautier's aestheticism and escapism were reactive in more than one sense: first, a protest against the tawdry politics and philistine society of his time, and second, a lifelong struggle against his inner oaf. Just as Socrates described himself as someone wh knew nothing but desired truth, Gautier admitted to being an unbeautiful person who desired beauty: you love something you don't have. And it turns out that Gautier's totem animal was the hippo.

L'hippopotame (Théophile Gautier)

The big-bellied hippopotamus
Lives in the jungles of Java,
Where monsters growl from every lair,
More than you'd ever dream of.
The boa uncoils and hisses,
the tiger unleashes his roar.
The buffalo bellows with rage --
but the peaceful hippo just feeds and sleeps.
The hippo fears neither sword nor spear,
He just stands and looks right at you.
He laughs and laughs at the sepoys' bullets
bouncing off his hide.
I am like the hippopotamus:
Swathed in my conviction,
protected by strong and inviolable armor,
fearlessly I cross the desert.

L'hippopotame au large ventre
Habite aux jungles de Java ,
Où grondent, au fond de chaque antre,
Plus de monstres qu'on n'en rêva.
Le boa se déroule et siffle,
Le tigre fait son hurlement,
Le buffle en colère renifle;
Lui, dort ou paït tranquillement.
Il ne craint ne kriss ni sagaies,
Il regarde l'homme sans fuir,

Il rit des balles des cipayes
Qui rebondissent sur son cuir.
Je suis comme l'hippopotame;
De ma conviction couvert,
Fort armure que rien n'entame,
Je vais sans peur par le désert.

Baudelaire's totem was an unhappier one: an albatross flopping helplessly on the ship's deck,a thing of beauty and grace in the air, but out of its element:

L'Albatros
(Charles Baudelaire)

Often to pass the time on board, the crew
will catch an albatross, one of those big birds
which nonchalantly chaperone a ship
across the bitter fathoms of the sea.

Tied to the deck, this sovereign of space,
as if embarrassed by its clumsiness,
pitiably lets its great white wings
drag at its sides like a pair of unshipped oars.

How weak and awkward, even comical
this traveller but lately so adoit -
one deckhand sticks a pipestem in its beak,
another mocks the cripple that once flew!

The Poet is like this monarch of the clouds
riding the storm above the marksman's range;
exiled on the ground, hooted and jeered,
he cannot walk because of his great wings.

Tr. Richard Howard

Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage
Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
Que suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
Le navire glissant sur les goufres amers.

A peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes
blanches
Comes des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, come it est gauche et veule!
Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!
L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-guele,
L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait!

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au mileu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

Rimbaud, who indeed was famously oafish by any standard, copied Baudelaire's albatross, adding a braying ass running through the fields and a dancing bear with purple gums:

Bottom

Reality being too thorny for my grand temperament, I found myself at my lady's: a big blue-gray bird soaring toward the moldings of the ceiling and dragging my wings after me in the shadows of the evening. At the foot of the canopy supporting her precious jewels and her physical masterpieces, I was a big bear with purple gums and fur hoary with grief, eyeing the crystal and silver on the consoles. Everything grew dark and radiant aquarium.[1] In the raging June dawn I ran through the fields, an ass, braying and brandishing my grievance, until the Sabines came from the suburbs to throw themselves onto my chest.

Bottom

La réalité étant trop épineuse pour mon grand caractère,- je me trouvai néanmoins chez ma dame, en gros oiseau gris bleu s'essorant vers les moulures du plafond et traînant l'aile dans les ombres de la soirée. Je fus, au pied du baldaquin supportant ses bijoux adorés et ses chefs-d'oeuvre physiques un gros

ours aux gencives violettes et au poil chenu de chagrin, les yeux aux cristaux et argents aux des consoles Tout se fit ombre et aquarium ardent[1] *Au matin aube de juin batailleuse, - je courus aux champs, âne, claironnant et brandissant mon grief, jusqu'à ce que les Sabines de la banlieue vinrent se jeter à mon poitrail.*

In the elegant world of literary studies, of course, everything I have written above is irrelevant or worse. It will be a long time before Oaf Studies becomes academically respectable; indeed, it may be impossible.

Note

1. I have spent years trying to figure out *aquarium ardent* -- the noun *aquarium* modified by the adjective *ardent.* I can only guess that the red light of the setting sun on the horizon was infiltrating the cool blueish shadows.

Appendix

This hippo poem by T. S. Eliot doesn't otherwise fit the paradigm here, but it was probably a tribute to Gautier.

The broad-backed hippopotamus
Rests on his belly in the mud;
Although he seems so firm to us
He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh and blood is weak and frail
Susceptible to nervous shock;
While the True Church can never fail
For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the True Church need never stir
To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach
The mango on the mango-tree;
But fruits of pomegranate and peach
Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice
Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,
But every week we hear rejoice
The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;
God works in a mysterious way—
The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,
By all the martyr'd virgins kist,
While the True Church remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

Heredia, “Les trophees”

For a realistic picture of the life of the centaur you can’t beat Heredia’s Parnassian sequence *Hercule et les Centaures*. He gets down to the nitty-gritty -- the seating arrangements for the various sorts of inlaws at centaur weddings, for example, or the stress put on the centaur marriage by husbands who are continually sneaking off to score blonde chicks, and by wives in heat galloping off to run with the thoroughbred studs.

Erik Satie

(*À bas Paladilhe et Lenepveu!*)[1]

Erik Satie was a truculent alcoholic who lived for decades in tiny, squalid apartments which no one was ever allowed to enter. After his death his family and friends had to remove two loads of garbage and rubbish before they could retrieve the manuscripts and other effects heaped haphazardly about the room.[2] He had only one very short serious relationship with a woman and hid his true feelings behind a sarcastic, whimsical mask which no one was ever able to penetrate.[3]

In short, a man after my own heart. His music can be described as pretty, and without the dirt and the surliness, he would have seemed a little bit too cute.

Satie was a man about town and a creature of Parisian café society -- a *flaneur,* if you insist. He assiduously cultivated his image, and over the years he staged numerous publicity stunts. Every day for years he wore the same matching *velours* outfit (of which he owned seven identical sets), thus receiving the nickname “the *velours* gentleman” -- i. e., as I pointed out above, "the corduroy gentleman".

Like many avant-gardists after 1870, Satie was a leftist – with each Socialist Party split, he stayed with the left faction, until he finally was a Bolshevik of sorts. During a long period of his later life he lived in the

mediocre working-class suburb of Arcueil, walking many miles home in the wee hours almost every night, drunk and carrying a hammer in his pocket in case of trouble. In Arcueil he adopted a more bourgeois image, became a respected member of the local lower-middle-class community, and engaged himself in educational projects with the local children -- his biographer Templier is the son of one of Satie's friends during that period.

Satie was actually extremely serious about music (and other things too), but he affected a clownish persona -- he's almost better known for his wisecracks and affectations than for his compositions. There's a long tradition of this kind of dandyism in France, going back to the time of Gerard de Nerval et. al. and continuing into the 1930s and beyond. It is usually explained by a pervasive political alienation among the French creative classes and by their resentment of the suffocatingly respectable French bourgeoisie. The need to escape from the smarm of Romanticism was certainly a second motive – Romanticism in Satie's time appeared above all in its grandiose and fatally earnest Wagnerian form, and Satie was the leader of French anti-Wagnerianism.

But the quirky and clownish streak in the French avant-garde also can be explained, not by bourgeois rejection, but by the fear of being absorbed by the voracious French culture establishment – as even Verlaine almost was, after he went Catholic. In France there was

an enormous appetite for serious Art, and for this reason artists were endangered as much by success as they were by failure.

People who lived before WWI (he relatively well-off ones) didn't realize how lucky they were. They really had a happiness then that hasn't been seen since. True, there has been a lot of scientific and economic progress since then, but couldn't we have had that without the two World Wars, the Cold War, and the incessant propaganda and continuous state of military mobilization we've lived with now for more than seventy years? When WWI and the Russian Revolution came along, at the time many rejoiced. Often they regretted it soon enough, but by then the genie was out of the bottle and nothing could be done. We're still living with that.

Facts about Satie

Satie's mother was Scottish, and (like Leopold Bloom) he was first baptized an Anglican. His given name was Eric; "Erik" was an affectation. He spent his early years in Honfleur, a Norman shipping town where his father was a ship-broker. In fact, many of the great Parisian avant-gardeists were provincials or foreigners – Apollinaire, Laforgue, Lautreamont, Corbiere, Rimbaud, Jarry, Satie, Henri Rousseau. In the same way, many of the great New York City jazz musicians came from places like Oklahoma or Iowa -- New York and Paris in their great days were as much escapes from other places as they were places in themselves.

Satie attended music school in his youth but was thought to be lazy, though as a pianist he was credited with a nice touch. In his younger days he earned his meager living partly as a cabaret pianist and composer of pop songs. Some say that he went to music school to avoid universal military service, whereas others claim that he briefly entered the army in order to escape music school. Late in life he dabbled in golf -- there are photographs. Satie may have been the first composer to write music intended to accompany film (*Entr'acte*, the surrealist Rene Clair's film short in the middle of Satie's *Relache*).

Satie to his brother Conrad, April 14th 1899:

"Why attack God himself? He is just as unhappy as we could be; since the death of his poor son he has no taste for anything and only nibbles at his food.

Although he has seated him on his good old right hand, he is still completely flabbergasted that men could play such a nasty trick on the one he cherished; and he only has time to murmur, in the saddest way possible, 'That wasn't fair'.

I doubt that whether at this moment he would send down to earth even one of his nephews; mankind has changed his mind about sending members of his family out on trips."

tr. Bullock

Notes

1. Paladilhe and Lenepveu, two otherwise forgotten musicians, were elected to the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in the year that Satie's candidacy was rejected.

2. Unfortunately, none of my sources say how large these loads were – a good subject for further research. (According to one of his friends, at least one dried turd was found in the mess). It is said that only two people ever saw the inside of this room during Satie's lifetime, one of them the mysterious Augustin Grass-Mick.

3. Satie's housekeeping reminds me of what I heard of Charlie Mingus, who at one point lived in a room littered with empty Campbell's soup cans (possibly thereby inspiring Andy Warhol). His personality reminds me more of Thelonius Monk's, whose compositions (with their unexpected twists and wrong notes) are almost the only ones that remind me of Satie's.

And like Mussorgsky (another of my heroes), Satie was unique but not very prolific, and many in the music world regarded him as incompetent. Also like Musorgsky, he composed on the piano and the opposite of scrupulous about voice-leading. In mid-career Satie actually went back to school to learn counterpoint, just as Rimsky-Korsakoff did, and just as Musorgsky did not.

Van Gogh as Chump

From an economic point of view, Vincent Van Gogh is a paradox. During his lifetime he was penniless and absolutely dependent on his brother Theo, and he earned virtually nothing from his art. Vincent died young, and when Theo also died shortly thereafter Vincent's oeuvre was essentially worthless, and Theo's investment could only have been regarded as a bad one, motivated by feelings of charity or family solidarity.

Nowadays single Van Goghs sell for fifty million dollars or more, and by simple processes of multiplication we can conclude that his corpus is worth considerably more than a billion dollars. Van Gogh's average annual value-added during his brief career must have been in the eight or nine figures, or several hundred thousand dollars a week. You have to ask yourself -- where was this money during Van Gogh's lifetime? Where did this value come from, since it simply didn't exist when the paintings were actually being painted? Considering that he and Theo never saw any of the loot either, from an economist's point of view weren't they just a couple of suckers?

People still make good livings off Van Gogh, but he couldn't make a living himself. He was a pitiful loser in the struggle for survival, whereas art dealers, as they themselves very well know, are the triumphant victors.

(Kenneth Rexroth noted long ago that used-car dealers would go to jail if their business practices were as shady as those of art dealers).

Pablo Picasso learned from Van Gogh's example and monetized himself very effectively. A great, prolific and extremely versatile artist, he had a fine business sense and was a pioneer both in the way he brand-named himself and in the way he reinvented himself from time to time, thus creating new product which could be sold to people even if they already owned earlier product. With Picasso the living artist hit the big time.

Andy Warhol was the third stage of the evolution of the artist. Van Gogh was an artistic genius but in business terms a chump. Picasso was a talented artist who had a keen sense of publicity and was alert to business trends. Warhol bypassed the talent part entirely, and while Picasso's self-invention sometimes involved gimmicks or labels, Warhol was all gimmick, all the time. His trademarks were silk screen, clashing colors, and the appropriation of images from popular culture, and he never varied them much. Warhol did not have to rely on actual artistic production; he vitalized his career with a vigorous stancing strategy in the worlds of fashion, high society and the media.

By now the commercial formulae of art have been standardized. Every new artist is a rebel rejecting the

conventions of society, and it's almost always the same conventions. Ordinary life is decontextualized and disenchanted. Contraries are juxtaposed and the normal is framed to seem strange. In commercial youth culture the sexual coming-of-age, which is exciting but somewhat frightening in every society, becomes the rejection of society, rather than just the ritual transition to adulthood via the violation of sexual taboos which in reality apply only to children. Generation after generation, we are continually being liberated over and over again from the same old taboos. To paraphrase Stephen Daedelus, liberation is a nightmare which we are trying to escape.

In this process, successful art revolutionaries normally end up counting their investments like Picasso, and surviving Bohemians, the ones that didn't take the message all that seriously, mostly slide into forms of normalcy only slightly different those those of their parents. (Van Gogh is not really a tempting model). Commercial youth rebellion, by encouraging young people to reject the values of their parents, actually makes them more malleable and easier to fit into the newer, cheesier world which market forces are creating.

Back to the original question. When Van Gogh died a lot of cash was tied up in academic paintings done by people no one has heard of since. Not long after his death, cash started flowing away from these paintings toward Van Gogh's paintings. The academic paintings

were stranded as historical curiosities, whereas Van Gogh's paintings can now be used as security to get multi-million-dollar loans from major banks.

So if we ask ourselves "Where was the cash value of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings during his lifetime?", the answer is simple. It was wherever the cash value of Andy Warhol's paintings will have gone a century from now, when people will be able to go to garage sales and spend $5 or so to buy one of the original prints Warhol cranked out.

Max Jacob

Max Jacob, an unclassifiable French author of the early twentieth century, has nonetheless been classified as a Cubist, a Surrealist and a Dadaist. He rejected the first label, and the Surrealists rejected him (along with Satie), but he wasn't really a Dadaist either.

The groups of literary history are just devices by which new authors band together to bring attention to their works. These ladders should be kicked away as soon as possible, since they impede reading more than they help it. After the dust has settled, coterie membership doesn't help a mediocre poet any, and it doesn't even harm a good one much. It does make sense to include Jacob on the long list of eccentric minor poets whose works have aged better than those of the major, ambitious poets.

Jacob's best friend in poetry was Apollinaire, and most of his other friends were painters -- Picasso among them. Along with Apollinaire he represents a milder, more humane version of Modernism than those which came before and after them. A Jew from Brittany, he spent his life in Paris and converted to a lax and eccentric version of Catholicism in 1914, but was sent to a death camp anyway in 1944.

He thought of himself, in my opinion correctly, as the third master of the French prose poem, after Aloysius Bertrand and Rimbaud (but ahead of several more famous poets who had tried their hand at the form). His poems were of many different flavors – whimsy, satire, parody, dream – and some among them do in fact recombine the elements of experience into nonsequential and impossible forms, as cubism does. Some of these poems are quite obscure, whereas others seem as if they would have worked as newspaper squibs to be read over breakfast.

Jacob was a socialite, and like all socialites, he had a very sharp eye and ear for the gossip, feuds, jealousies, resentments, and the other foibles of his kind, as below. From now on, whenever I hear about a particularly silly academic or literary pissing-match, I will think of the principals snatching the pillows from a commode and tossing them at one another's heads.

The Customs of the Literati
(“Mœurs Littéraires”
from *Le Cornet à dés*)

When a pack of gentlemen meets a different pack, it would be strange if greetings were not interspersed with smiles. When a pack of gentlemen meets a single gentleman, if there are formal greetings, they will trail off -- and perhaps the last of the pack will make none at all.

It seems that I wrote that you bit a woman on the nipple and drew blood. If you think that I wrote that, why did you just greet me? And if I thought that you would do such a thing, why would I greet you? Now we're at the home of a large bespectacled woman wearing a knit shawl. You shook my hand, but when we found ourselves in the room where her commode was kept, you threw cushions from the commode at my head. (Louis Quatorze cushions). People say that I was throwing cushions too, just so they can blame me too, but I don't know whether that's really true.

When my pack meets yours, if I am the last one and make no greeting, don't let yourself think that it's because of that business with the cushions. And if my pack meets yours and smiles are exchanged, don't let yourself think that one of them comes from me.

Enid Starkie v. The Wolf Man

Enid Starkie, *Petrus Borel.*

The French bohemian poet and author Petrus Borel ("the Lycanthrope", fl. 1830-1840) was noted for his violently republican political beliefs and his extravagant attitudes (e.g. Satanism). His bitter, cynical fiction sold poorly, and before he abandoned writing he lived for a considerable time in real poverty. By and large his writings have been forgotten, and he is generally regarded as having been briefly important as a personage, and perhaps as an influence, but not as a writer; but during his brief prime he was a major figure in the world of bohemia. His final misfortune was to have his biography written by Enid Starkie.

Starkie's disapproval of Borel reveals itself in sharp passing comments scattered through the book. Borel's grandiose attitudes, irregular way of life, and lack of shrewdness and worldly wisdom are all blamed for his defeat, which she interprets as weakness and proof of his inferiority. As far as I know Starkie gets the facts right, with one possible and rather large exception, but she treats Borel's misfortunes as, in effect, judgments — things that wouldn't have happened to a better man.

Starkie's attitude toward her subject does not have to be teased out:

> *Indeed nothing sound could be expected from the collaboration of two such madmen as Gerard de Nerval and Petrus Borel (p.148)*

> *Neither he nor Nerval had been able to acclimatise themselves to ordinary everyday life (p. 191)*

> *Champfleury describes him as a shabby middle-aged man…. talking solemnly and grandiloquently in archaic language. He still thought of himself as a leader, still tried to assert his ascendancy over others …. only Baudelaire, with his sympathy and understanding for failures, recognized something noble and fine in this tragic wreck….Life however broke Borel as it was never to break Baudelaire (p. 149)*

This is a repeated theme; Gautier was also "a survivor". (Baudelaire, the greatest poet of the age unless it was Hugo, admired Borel and learned from him, which suggests that Borel was in fact a leader).

> *Petrus Borel was the kind of meteoric personality who is thrown up by violent revolution, whose light burns brightly for a short space, as long as the fashion for destruction prevails, and finally, because he cannot adapt himself to the conditions of a stable society, splutters out into obscurity. (p. 193)*

Starkie has a particular contempt for Borel's incapacity for bureaucratic infighting. When his bohemian days were over, and after finding no success in journalism, Borel took a position in France's new Algerian colony. After what seems to have been a good start he came into conflict with a new superior and was fired, dying in poverty not long afterward. Bureaucratic infighting is often vicious but meaningless, and based on what Starkie tells us, it's hard for us to be sure about what really happened, but for Starkie it wasn't. She come down hard on the side of prudence, worldly wisdom, and bureaucratic smarts, and against uppity subordinates:

> *At the inquiry into Borel's accusations, it transpired that he had tramped around the country collecting gossip and slander to build up his indictment, all of which he believed implicitly without verification, just as he had elicited it from idle wastrels who were ready to slander others provided that they were not obliged to substantiate their statements on oath in a court of law, ready to say anything for the sake of a free drink. (p. 181)*

> *Whatever may be the truth concerning Borel's allegations against de Gantès, there is little doubt that his action was, from his own point of view, extremely foolish....It is impossible to unravel the*

> *truth ...whether true or false is not clear....[de Gantès'] supporters may well have been lying.... (p. 184)*
>
> *A cleverer man than Borel would have left that particular hornet's nest severely alone .... (p. 187)*

Starkie's strong predisposition is to favor those who are successful in "ordinary everyday life". There's no "there but for the grace of God go I" in Starkie's book, because Starkie would never have gone that way. For all her reported eccentricity, Starkie, unlike Borel and Nerval, was a worldly-wise survivor who knew which hornets' nests to avoid and how to flourish in the academic snakepit. Like any good bourgeois, she also knows that there's no arguing with success, and the corollary of that is that there's no excuse for failure. And whatever Borel was, he was a failure.

Starkie's book calls to mind the Ultimate Failure series of the American 50s and 60s. Twain, Melville, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, and God knows who else -- all were failures in the end. This seems like a dangerous kind of judgment for prosperous academic bureaucrats to be making. Can the University (an established institution which provides its minions with a routinized path to success) really be the fair judge of personal worth in cases like this?

To my knowledge there are no starving or avant-garde biographers. Biographers of starving artists live in an entirely different world than do their pitiful subjects, and they always have more worldly success, common sense, and bureaucratic cunning than the biographees, but after all, it's the biographees who are remembered a century and a half after their deaths,whereas the parasitical biographers are remembered only through them.

You can't tell the players without a program

France around 1830 was rich in factions and tendencies, and you can’t read about the French literature of the first half of the 19th century without running into a large number of competing groups — political, literary, or simply social. So I have compiled a list.

France changed its basic form of government four times between 1787 and 1830 (plus another couple of changes during the revolutionary period), and in 1830 partisans of most of the past regimes were still around. The main political factions were the royalist ultras, the Bourbon royalists, the Girondin republicans, the Jacobin republicans, the Lafayette republicans, the Bonapartists, and the moderate, semi-liberal Orleans royalists who took power with the July Revolution. (There were also the utopian socialist followers of Fourier or Saint-Simon, but while they got their ideas out, they didn’t really have a real political role). All this was a business of the middle and upper classes; whatever political groups existed within the bottom 70% or so of the population were regarded with fear and disdain.

Of these French political factions, only the royalists really had much of a chance in 1830, since France or Germany would have intervened if an assertive

Bonapartist or republican government had been established. The Bourbon monarchy imposed by England and Germany in 1815 was supposedly a resurrection of the Ancien Regime, but by 1815 no one younger than about 40 remembered the Ancien Regime at all, and many of those who did remember it opposed it. And even many of the royalists had no real respect for the Bourbons, who were entirely lacking in *gloire,* but while the Bourbons weren't royalist enough for the ultras, they were too royalist for everyone else.

This set the French structural pattern of eternal political dissatisfaction. If there are many ideologies, there is no ideology. So it was also at this time that political moderation (*le juste milieu*) was invented -- simultaneously with the disgruntled bohemian counterculture. With *le juste milieu* you get minimally tolerable government which doesn't make anyone happy, and politicians rise as factional ideologues and rule as moderate traitors.

The literary world mimicked the political world. The big split was between the romantics just then coming onstage and everyone else: the classicists, the *philosophe*s, and the republicans. The romantics were first led by Charles Nodier of *l'Arsenal* (a library), but around 1830 Victor Hugo seized power for his *Cénacle*, and a little after 1830 Théophile Gautier and Petrus Borel established the *Petit Cénacle*, which included

younger writers. (Nodier, Hugo, and Gautier all became famous for praising the writing of anyone who ever brought them a manuscript.) The first two groups were just salons, but some of the members of the *Petit Cénacle* were housemates, and they threw rowdy parties of a type which should be familiar to many readers.

Most of the factional activity took place among the romantics. The romantic factions were *Les Meditateurs, Les Frénétiques, Les Larmoyants, Les Illuminés, Le Petit Cénacle, Les Jeunes-France, Les Buveurs d'Eau*, the literary *Bousingots*, the political *Bousingots*, *Les Badouillards, Les Muscardins* (dormice*), Les Dandys* and *Les Bohèmes*. Dividing lines between the groups were fluid, with a lot of overlap and switching. The heaviest action took place between 1831 (by which time the new government had succeeded in disappointing everyone) and 1834, when violent uprisings took place and most writers became apolitical. The polemical fervor of these groups belies the fact that most of them, if they had any politics at all, were only vaguely royalist, republican or liberal and not much more than that.

Most of the countercultural forms and rituals now in place anywhere in the world can be traced to this period, so the reader who has mastered the categories above will be well-equipped to pigeonhole writers and counterculturalists of almost any era.

"Bousingot": not in your dictionaries

Nerval et les Bousingots
Francis Dumont.

The word *bousingot*, which designates certain French political and literary rebels during the period 1830-1835, was used as a political label only during that very brief period and cannot be found in my ten pounds of French dictionaries. As Hugo explains in *Les Miserables*, it had replaced the word *jacobin*, and would itself be replaced by the word *demagogue*.

Luckily, there are resources on the internet to help me track down the word's origins. The word comes from sailors' and farmer's argot and around 1830 was adopted by *Les Jeunes-France* of *Le Petit Cénacle*, a group of literary rebels of that era led by Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval. Their enemies picked the word up to use against them, and when it eventually came to be used to designate insurrectionary political revolutionaries of 1832 and 1834, the literary *bouzingos* (their spelling) dropped the label. The word has survived as a historical reference to the rebels of that era, but otherwise it has mostly fallen from use.

The "original meaning" of *bousingot* reminds you of the definition of *cur* in Flann O'Brien's apocryphal *Old Irish Dictionary*. "Bousingot" means a stable, manure, a snuffbox, a dive bar, a whorehouse, hubbub or

racket, and a kind of sailor's hat. Of these meanings, per *Argoji,* even as argot or slang only the "hubbub" and "whorehouse" meanings survived into the later nineteenth century.

Both in its original use and in its extended politico-cultural meaning the word *bousingot* was a contested and rather hostile term with no fixed referent, always looking for new victims, and in its extended cultural / political meaning the word was both an accusation and a defiant and jocular self-description.

Conjecturally, the history of this never-respectable word goes as follows. To begin with, *bousin* meant a stable or whatever was on the floor of a stable, and the rare or extinct family name *Bousingot* (attested in early New France) would be like the English name *Stabler*. (Nyrop gives examples of this kind of *-ot* derivation.) By analogy *bousin* came to mean low and dirty dive bars and whorehouses, especially on the waterfront, and *bousingot* came to mean the rowdies who frequented such places, their rowdiness, their noise, their hats, and even their nasty snuffboxes filled with that smelly brown substance.

Les Jeunes-France picked up the name in a jocular way, the journalist Janin made it famous with his satires, and the word spread wider and was adopted by or applied to political demonstrators and rioters (especially the students among them) -- at which time the literary

Jeunes-France backed off. In the end the word reverted to its rowdy dive bar meaning.

The "bousingot" episode exemplifies the mutual dependency and interpenetration of counterculturalists and their bourgeois journalistic adversaries. Janin started as an adversary of the bohemians, *bousingots*, and *frénetiques*, but as a journalist he depended on them for titillating copy, just as these performance artists relied upon him for publicity they needed. At one point he wrote a book called *L'Âne mort et la Femme Guillotinée,* which was meant as parody of *les frénétiques* but was so well done that some suspected that he had become one of them, and in the end he more or less had.

Sources

Dumont, p. 20:
"[Ce mot] devait donc venir, soit de bouse, pris comme synonyme d'ordure; soit de bos (comme bouse lui-meme) et alors un bousin aurait signifié primitivement une étable, un repaire de bouviers. Cette étymologie me semble confirmée par l'autre sense de bousingot: ce serait des tabatières à l'usage de bouviers." Un autre correspondent de "L'Intermédiaire" signale le 10 avril 1874: "Le term de bousin, d'où on aurait fait bousingot était connu bien avant 1830, car je le trouve employé (p. 24) dans "La Vie des ducs d'Orleans" Londres Imprimerie du Palais St. James, 1789."

Kristoffer Nyrop, Grammaire historique de la langue francaise, vol. 3, p. 141, #288: some words derived using the -ot suffix.

Argoji *(*an online dictionary of French argot) on "bousingot" and related words (but the earliest relevant definition is from 1864):

Bouibouis (Hayard, 1907): Endroit mal famé.
Bouis (Bras-de-Fer, 1829): Fouet.
Bouis (Rigaud, 1888): Maison de tolérance, dans l'ancien argot.
Bouis (le) (Halbert, 1849): Le fouet.
Bouis-bouis (Rigaud, 1888): Café-concert, petit théâtre à femmes, petit restaurant, où ces dames, aux jours d'épreuves vont prendre leur nourriture. Dans le jargon des voleurs, un bouis est une maison de tolérance, et le nom vulgaire de la maison de tolérance a également la signification de bruit, tapage ; d'où bouis-bouis, pour désigner un endroit à femmes, un endroit où régnent le vacarme et les mauvaises mœurs.

Rigaud, 1888:
Bousingot*: épithète injurieuse qu'on adresait aux républicains en 1830 et 1832. -- Partisan des idées littéraires à la mode à cette époque. -- Romantiques par opposition aux classiques, dont ils étaient les ennemis jurés.*

J. Claretie, Pètrus Borel le Lycanthrope:

Il [Pètrus Borel] passait, vètu de son costume de bousingo: le gilet à la Robespierre, sur la tète le chapeau pointu et à large boucle des conventionnels, les cheveux ras à la Titus, la barbe entière et longue au moment où personne encore ne la portait ainsi.

En un mot les bousingots comme les Jeunes-France ètaient «des poseurs». (M. Ch. Nisard fait venir bousingot de l'argot anglais Bowsingken, maison où l'on boit. Pourquoi pas de l'ancien bouis, maison vouée à Vènus publique, qui a fait bousin et bouis-bouis? -- Parce que c'ètait trop naturel et trop simple).

French wiki:

D'après Charles Nisard (Curiosités de l'étymologie française, s. v., Librairie Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1863, page 36), de l'ancien argot des marins anglais bowsing ken : maison où l'on boit (bowsing étant de la mème famille que le français bousin, qui signifie argotiquement bordel au sens propre comme au sens figuré).

Bousingot masculin:

1. Ancien chapeau de marin en cuir verni, plat, et dont un bord légèrement relevé fait le tour.
2. En France, après la révolution de 1830, a désigné, non sans une nuance désapprobatrice, un jeune homme affichant des opinions démocratiques jugées outrancières ou démagogiques.

Petit glossaire de la prostitution *(from Encyclopédia Universalis):*

BOUSIN, BOUZIN: cabaret, mauvais lieu, bordel. Aristide Bruant, L'Argot au XXe siècle. Dictionnaire Français-Argot. 1901. Cité par A. Boudard, L'Age d'or..., p. 184.
BOUSINGOT: bousingo, ou bouzingo, ou encore bousingot, appartient au vocabulaire romantique. Le mot est emprunté à l'argot de la marine anglaise (bousin = 1o cabaret, mauvais lieu ; 2o tintamarre; 3o chapeau de marin). Ayant été employé dans le refrain d'une chanson : "nous avons fait du bouzingo", lors d'un tapage nocturne mémorable du Petit Cénacle, ce terme fut appliqué par la suite aux membres de ce dernier en raison de leur agitation et de leur débraillé vestimentaire. Eux-mèmes revendiquent le mot et décident d'une publication collective: Les Contes du Bouzingo; seuls La Main de gloire, de Gérard de Nerval, et

Onophrius, de Théophile Gautier, verront le jour. Parallèlement, le mot se retrouve employé dans une acception politique et s'applique aux étudiants révolutionnaires qui participèrent aux émeutes de février et de juin 1832. Une série d'articles leur est consacrée dans Le Figaro (févr. 1832), faisant une assimilation un peu trop hâtive avec les Bousingots littéraires [...]. Enfin, bousingot désigne le chapeau de cuir verni, élément essentiel de la panoplie de la jeunesse romantique.

Victor Hugo (Les Miserables):

From time to time parties re-sole their old insults. In 1832 the word "bousingot" formed the interim between the word "jacobin", which had become obsolete, and the word "demagogue", which has since rendered such excellent service.

...

"We are so wretched, my respectable sir! We have arms, but there is no work! We have the will, no work! I don't know how the government arranges that, but, on my word of honor, sir, I am not Jacobin, sir, I am not a bousingot."

From Les mots qui restent , Roger Alexandre, 1901:
Enfin, le 23 mars, paraît "Le bousingot rouge", où il est dit : « Après avoir usé le chapeau de cuir verni et le large ruban bleu, il vient d'adopter le chapeau rouge».... « Pourquoi l'ont-ils pris rouge? C'est que le rouge c'est la couleur du sang, le sang leur couleur, leurs principes... »

George Sand's typology of French students, ca. 1830 (from her novel *Horace*):

Carousers: who spend their day at the Chaumiere, at cabarets, at the Pantheon dance hall, screaming, smoking, vociferating in the foul and hideous air.

Grinds – very restrained, who shut themselves in, live in poverty, and give themselves over to material labor resulting in cretinism.

Café Students: attached to their habits of strolls, billiard rooms, and endless smokes in taverns, or walks in noisy groups in the Luxembourg Gardens.

Bousingots: student rioters, political youths who sometimes stir up trouble and sometimes have a legitimate gripe.

See: http:// haquelebac.wordpress.com/2010/ 03/07/bousingot-not-in-your-dictionaries/

Bohemian Publicity

"Bourgeois" doesn't mean a citizen with the rights of the city. A duke may be bourgeois in the indirect sense in which the word has been used for the past thirty years or so. Bourgeois, in France, means roughly the same as philistine in Germany, and it means everyone, whatever his position, who is not initiated in the arts or doesn't understand them. Once upon a time.... it was enough to be pink-cheeked and clean-shaven, with a square shirt-collar, and a stove-pipe hat, to be apostrophized with this injurious epithet.

> Theophile Gautier, in *Le Moniteur universel,* Dec. 31, 1855; cited in Richardson, *The Bohemians,* p. 52.

Bohemia was not outside a realm outside bourgeois life but represents a conflict that was at its very heart.....What these instances of fascination with bourgeois enjoyments betray not insincerity but a more genuine and deeper quality: ambivalence.

> Jerrold Siegel, *Bohemian Paris,* pp. 11, 53.

The bohemians and the bourgeoisie were warring brothers, and you couldn't have one without the other. Especially after 1830, bohemians (often of bourgeois origins) had to survive in a bourgeois world, and if they were artists the disappearance of aristocratic and church patronage meant that they had to sell on the bourgeois market. On the one hand, they had to engage bourgeois tastes in some way, if only by titillating and outraging them, and on the other, they needed to publicize themselves in order to find their market.

The near riot at the premiere of Victor Hugo's play *Hernani* (one of the turning points of French romanticism) was staged. At that time no entertainment could succeed without packing the audience one way or another on opening night. For the *Hernani* opening, besides paying 280 francs to the traditional paid *claqueurs*, Hugo had also papered the house by handing out tickets to every young romantic in town. These volunteer *claqueurs,* led by Theophile Gautier wearing a flaming red waistcoat (or something) which immediately became famous, carried the day against the classicist goon squad, and Hugo's play was a success and put romanticism on the map.

> *This first symbolic encounter of the young Romantics with the generation in power made a hero out of Victor Hugo ...Hugo had made contact with the younger generation. These "Hugolâtres"*

> *were the "soldiers" who would prevent* Hernani *from being booed off the stage the way* Amy Robsart *had been ....This untapped resource*, *the generous youth of today, stifled by a badly organized society*, *was to be smuggled in to the Comedie Francaise as a reinforcement to the paid claqueurs, who were know to be susceptible to bribes.*
>
> Robb, *Victor Hugo,* pp. 144-147.

Newspapers love scandal, and this episode made Gautier, Nerval, and their friends famous. Journalists like Gozlan and Janin happily publicized and deplored their scandalous doings even after the play had closed, and under the name of "Bouzingos" they became the first bohemians -- though the word "bohemian" (from a word meaning "gypsy") itself was not used before the appearance of Murger's fictionalized memoir *Scènes de la Bohème* a decade and a half later (the source of the opera *La Bohème*). Eventually Gautier, Nerval, and Murger, none of whom could take bohemian life quite at face value, joined Gozlan and Janin as journalists, while the *bouzingos* who couldn't make it as journalists either died of starvation and tuberculosis like Aloysius Bertrand and Joseph Desbrosses ("*Le Christ* "), or else took low-level civil service jobs as Petrus Borel and Philothée O'Neddy did.

Zola, who had worked in publicity before he became an author, was keenly aware of the value of noise, and his "naturalism" was a marketing scam or, in contemporary terms, a way of branding himself:

> *This evening Flaubert, while paying tribute to his colleague's genius,* attacked *the prefaces, the doctrines, the naturalist professions of faith, in a word all the flamboyant humbug with which Zola helps along the sale of his books. Zola replied roughly to this effect: "You, you had private means which allowed you to remain independent of a good many things. But I had to earn my living with nothing but my pen; I had to go through the mill of journalism and write all sorts of shameful stuff; and it has left me with -- how shall I put it -- a certain taste for charlatanism.... I consider the word "naturalism" as ridiculous as you do, but I shall go on repeating it over and over again, because you have to give things new names for the public to think that they are new.*
>
> Goncourts, p. 229.
> *1885*

The aristocratic Goncourts disliked bohemians and frequently accused them of being publicity hounds, and they hated the commercialization of culture, but they

ended up having to play the game like anyone else. Dumas introduced them to the rudiments in 1875 (45 years after Hernani):

> *After dinner Dumas began to speak very interestingly about the way a theatrical success was organized, and at one point, turning toward Flaubert and myself, he said in a voice in which profound contempt was combined with something akin to pity: "You fellows, you don't realize the importance, for the success of a play, of the composition of the first night audience, you have no idea of all that has to be done.... For instance, you have to make sure that there are friends and admirers sitting around the four or five members every club sends along on those occasions, because they are anything but enthusiastic theater-goers. And if you don't see about this, and about that....." And he taught us many things of which we were totally ignorant and which, now that we know them, we shall never be able to put into practice.*

Goncourts p. 211-212

The Goncourts grumbled, but they ultimately caved in:

> *I listened to this, ashamed but, I must admit, not sufficiently disgusted at the prospect of shortly being dishonored by this Sarah Bernhardt-type publicity.*

Goncourts, p. 266.

Oddly enough, one of the best publicists and businessmen in the 19th c. French cultural world was Gustave Courbet, who also was one of the very few to support the Paris Commune and, as I have noticed elsewhere, like Victor Hugo an erotic realist. A provincial kulak in origin, Courbet used the rejection of his supposedly scandalous paintings by the Academy to promote a very successful one man show, the first of its kind, at which he sold many more paintings than he would have at the Academy showing.

Madame Bovary

Madame Bovary
Gustave Flaubert, tr. Hopkins.

I can't be fair to Emma. For me, reading the book was unbearable, like watching the slow-motion crash of an airliner I had almost boarded. Give Flaubert credit for writing a powerful book.

Emma is the misogynist's idea of Woman: emotional, incapable of rationality, but exciting. From a Social Darwinist point of view, she was the natural prey of the seducer Rodolphe and the usurer Lheureux, and could never have been anything else -- whereas the hapless Charles (the me-figure in this story) was her own natural prey. From a Buddhist point of view, her story is a tidy little morality play about the fatally self-defeating essence of desire. Or it could be a bourgeois homily on debt, or a pious object lesson inculcating the virtues of chastity and faithfulness. But I don't think those are messages I was intended to get.

Don't tell me that this is realism and that there's no moral to the story. Flaubert just had a most peculiar way of spilling his guts. He objectified his feelings in minute details which he insisted also had to be accurate descriptions of physical reality. Everything had to work two ways at once, which is why the book took so long to write. Flaubert's own voice is hidden. In this he is like

several generations of post-romantic or anti-romantic French poets who renounced the declamatory, prophetic voice and the identification of the voice of the work with the author's personal voice.

He slips occasionally and throws in an old-fashioned metaphor or simile. Emma's hopes are compared to wounded swallows flopping in mud, but no actual swallows are present. Upper-class women do not really have banknotes in their stays protecting them like a cuirass. The same goes for the plotting. In Rouen Emma's meeting by coincidence with Léon is really a bit much, and even more so the later rumor he and Emma hear, purely by chance of course, about her seducer Rodolphe. Homais' extravagant tantrum about the arsenic, which serves to set up Emma's suicide later in the book, seems gimmicky, and the reappearance of the symbolic blind beggar at the end is the worst of all.

The episode of the amputation also seems wrong. Charles is mediocre, unromantic, boring, and not rich enough -- that's what drives the story. But he's not the type to attempt an innovative, untested surgical operation, and indeed, the book shows Homais as the one in charge. My bet is that as the story progressed, Flaubert found the pitiful Charles becoming a little too sympathetic (while still boring), so he threw in the disastrous operation to rebalance the plot. That was just "piling on". (Both the Homais tantrum and the

amputation episode strike me as grotesque realism, as in Gogol, though more clearly satirical than Gogol).

Was there a turning point? I came away feeling that there wasn't, and that it was just destiny, as Charles said. The world in which Emma's needs could have been met has never existed and could never exist. From the time of the wedding (which was more her idea than his) Charles and Emma were doomed. Given who he was, Charles couldn't have made things better by loving Emma more or by being more attentive. In fact he ended up loving her terribly, as the book shows, but by then it was too late.

I have wondered whether things might have turned out better if she had just married a prosperous peasant of her own class, but probably that's just me. The terribly mediocre bourgeois life of Yonville seems much less fun than the jolly, brutal life of the country folk.

Rodolphe is contemptuous of Bovary's resigned acceptance. In fact a real man, a sexy man whom Emma could love, would have killed Rodolphe, or Emma, and maybe himself too. At least he would also have put Emma in her place by beating her soundly. Presumably this is also not the message we are supposed to take from the book, but is the message that the men Emma most desired would have taken. Instead, Charles pitifully tries to make Emma happy by letting her have everything she asks for.

A feminist reading would be that Emma is the way she is because women are like that when they're unfree. To me this is wrong. At the end of the book Emma controls the family finances -- how could she be more free than that? But not only does she squander the family money, but all of the financial agreements she signs are bad and disadvantageous and probably fraudulent. I found Flaubert's presentation of these agreements terribly confusing, and given what we know about Flaubert's method, I think that we can conclude that this was intentional, and that he was mimicking the tricks Lheureux used to confuse Emma and Charles.

Emma wanted her love to be "caparisoned". Money had to be spent. She wasn't a gold-digger and didn't care where the money came from -- mostly she spent Charles' money on the other men. It was said of the recent celebrity multi-millionaire Paris Hilton that she loved the way her multi-millionaire lover Paris Latsis spent money. She could easily have bought everything herself, but the experience of the transaction was what excited her. This is the maximum development of the bourgeois *eros* of late capitalism, etc.

We can call *Madame Bovary* a satire on bourgeois life, but not because Emma was a victim of the bourgeoisie or really part of it. She was an unsuccessful aspirant to an imaginary high-bourgeois world where the money flowed freely -- the opposite of the actual

bourgeois world. And the various non-bourgeois worlds where she might have been happy were all imaginary too.

If Emma had made it to Paris (like Hilton and Latsis) would she have been happy there? Not likely -- competition is pretty fierce in the big leagues. One of the fatally self-defeating aspects of Emma's desire is that it was comparative. Whatever she had, she always needed more. Just by simple arithmetic, almost no one who wants more at any given point is going to get it, because there's only so much there and too many people want it. In kid sports, the moms pretend that every athlete can be a winner, but the whole point of sports is to make losers of every player but one. Desire works about the same way. Your capacity for wanting is by definition greater than your capacity ofr getting.

When Emma died miserably, the Church forgave her even though she was a suicide, and I had to forgive her too. The last pages were terribly affecting. But my God, what a nightmare the three hundred preceding pages had been!

Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*

> *Through the two open windows he could see people in the windows of the houses opposite. Broad puddles quivered like watered silk on the drying asphalt, and a magnolia at the edge of the balcony filled the room with its perfume. This scent .... etc., etc., etc.*[1]
>
> Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, tr. Baldick

I feel guilty, because Flaubert probably spent hours or days writing that paragraph, but when I came to it I just skimmed past it, because who cares? Likewise, when the woman Frederic has pursued for years takes him on a guided tour of her husband's ceramics factory in order to keep him from declaring his love, that's hilarious, but did Flaubert really have to spend two days reading up on ceramics just so he could have Mme. Arnoux use the terms "drabblers" and "roughing shop" correctly? There's tons of that stuff, and Flaubert worked so *hard* on it, but I just don't care.

Indeed, is not Mme. Arnoux, heaping up facts into a barrier making communication impossible, the very image of the realistic novelist? And then again, does not Frédéric, the obsessive lover, reminded of his supposed beloved by every tiny detail of pretty much anything, take us back to Petrarch?

Nonetheless, with *Sentimental Education* Flaubert, after several false starts, has finally succeeded in writing a non-annoying novel. I will even go further, and declare that in this book, Flaubert came as close as anyone has to portraying the real nature of the eternal fiasco of *eros*.

Frédéric is the most inept seducer ever, and he ends up relaying messages between M. Arnoux (the wealthy man to whom he has attached himself), Arnoux's lovely wife (whom he is intent on seducing), and Arnoux's also-lovely mistress (whom he is also intent on seducing, though several hundred pages into the novel he still hasn't scored with either).[2] And after that, he starts offering them all relationship counseling. There's no way these scenes could be improved.

When the Mme. Arnoux's wife finally does comes to Frederic's place, alone, it is only to wheedle a substantial never-to-be-repaid loan out of him in order to save her beloved husband from bankruptcy; Frédéric then makes his play, after years of pining, and Mme Arnoux responds with a lecture on prudence worthy of a Kansas housewife. To cap it off, Frederic fights a kind of a duel to defend the good name of M. Arnoux, or maybe Mme. Arnoux's good name, or perhaps Arnoux's mistress's good name. (*Les Arnoux* were the Tom and Daisy Buchanan of their time.)

It's useless. It's hard to make an antiwar movie because movies have to be exciting, and the excitement will make the movie objectively prowar. Same for anti-

drug messages. In the same way, every book about high society explains that people in high society are shallow and heartless, but high society rolls on untouched, and the moths still flock to the candle, using these novels as guidebooks. (In point of fact, *The Great Gatsby* was Hefner's chosen model for the Playboy Lifestyle).

Love affairs in novels always end badly, as in life, but that makes no difference at all – people who already have the love itch seldom even bother to read these prophylactic texts, and if they happen to do so they don’t get the message. These stories might have some restorative and comforting effect for those who have already been burned, but they don’t keep anyone away from the flame.

Notes

1. Early in the morning they went to visit the palace. Going through the main gate, they saw the whole facade in front of them.: the five towers with their pointed roofs and the horseshoe staircase at the far end of the courtyard, which was flanked on the left and the right by two lower buildings. In the distance....

This is the Fontainebleau Palace, and he goes on for four more pages. James Fenimore Cooper couldn't have done better.

2. Frederic finally does score on page 283, but you just know that his triumph will end up turning to ashes in his mouth.

Another reason to dislike Flaubert

I read French reasonably well, but for a long time I only read nonfiction, poetry, scholarly writing, and occasional internet posts, never fiction. In my experience fiction was slow going because it required too much vocabulary and too much time with the dictionary.Then I ordered the Goncourt's Germinie Lacerteux online, and since the title of the English version is the same as the title of the original, the French version was what I got. So I went and read it, and it wasn't hard at all. Where'd I gotten the idea that I couldn't read French well enough to read novels?

Madame Bovary, that's where. Decades ago I decided to take a shot at French fiction by reading what in those days was regarded as the greatest novel of all time. But on approximately page two of the book you get this paragraph:

> *C'était une de ces coiffures d'ordre composite, où l'on retrouve les éléments du bonnet à poil, du chapska, du chapeau rond, de la casquette de loutre et du bonnet de coton, une de ces pauvres choses, enfin, dont la laideur muette a des profondeurs d'expression comme le visage d'un imbécile. Ovoïde et renflée de baleines, elle commençait par trois boudins circulaires; puis s'alternaient, séparés par une bande rouge, des losanges de velours et de poils de lapin; venait*

> *ensuite une façon de sac qui se terminait par un polygone cartonné, couvert d'une broderie en soutache compliquée, et d'où pendait, au bout d'un long cordon trop mince, un petit croisillon de fils d'or, en manière de gland.*

In order to read a single goddamn paragraph about a goddamn hat I had to look up *casquette, bonnet à poil, chapska, chapeau ron, casquette de loutre, bonnet de coton, boudins circulaires, polygone cartonné, broderie en soutache, croisillon,* and *gland*, and half the English definitions were useless anyway. "Otter hat"? "Polish hat?" — I still couldn't visualize the stupid thing. But for Flaubert, it was *une de ces pauvres choses, enfin, dont la laideur muette a des profondeurs d'expression comme le visage d'un imbécile*. The hat pretty much clinched the case against poor Charles, who was now famous and doomed for all eternity.

In the meantime I've studied Chinese, Anglo-Saxon, Portuguese, Mongol, and what not, but I've skipped the French fiction. Maybe it was just as well. All those guys — Realists, Naturalists, Parnassians, Decadents, the whole boatload — devoutly believed that the accumulation of visual detail, plus mysterious intuition, plus fine writing, gives you direct access to deep reality. That was what Charles' hat was all about. But to me it just looks like the effective literary projection of Flaubert's class prejudices, with extra-credit vocabulary words thrown in as a bonus.

Stacking wheat and things of that kind, Part I

In chapters XIII-XV of Hamlin Garland's *Boy Life on the Prairie* the stacking of wheat is explained in enough detail for the book to be usable as an instruction manual, and he also describes the various technical changes wheat harvesting went through during his lifetime. (I just barely remember the kind of crew-operated threshing machine he mentioned, which left a big pile of chaff; it had replaced hand stacking long before and would soon be replaced by the combine). Stacking wheat was a difficult and critical job, and good stackers were in high demand during the harvest season -- though not really afterwards, since they were just farmworkers after all.

Things were about the same in France:

> *My father would contract to cut certain fields of rye or oats, the only grains grown in our area at that time. When the grain was brought in, my father was much in demand for that particular job, setting the sheaves up in rounded stacks called* groac'hel. *He was a past master in the art of constructing such stacks. Stacks had to be very well built; because the winnowing was done entirely by flail, it took a long time, and if during*

that time it should rain heavily on poorly constructed stacks, the water would get inside and everything would be ruined, grain and straw.

Jean-Marie DeGuignet, *Memoirs of a Breton Peasant*

Arthur Rimbaud left this tough job for his mom:

Delahaye was slightly awed when he called at the farm… He found his friend at harvest-time, rhythmically heaving the sheaves of wheat overhead to his mother, who formed the haystack.
Rimbaud, Graham Robb, p. 301.

In the high and far-off times they even stacked things in New England. Maybe they still do sometimes, at re-enactments and the like. Robert Frost:

"But most of all
He thinks if he could have another chance
To teach him how to build a load of hay"
"I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
He bundles every forkful in its place,
And tags and numbers it for future reference,
So he can find and easily dislodge it
In the unloading. Silas does that well.

He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.
You never see him standing on the hay
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself."

In Flaubert's *Buvard and Pecuchet,* part of the indictment against the monstrous and loathsome title characters is that their stacks of wheat spontaneously combust because they stacked it following the Clap-Meyer method from the Netherlands.

Stacks were stacked out in the field, though, not in Chicago. I don't know where Sandburg got this from:
Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and
the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders....

During his youthful years in the U.S. the great Norwegian author, Nobelist, and quisling Knut Hamsun worked the wheat harvest on a bonanza farm (like a plantation) in North Dakota, and he warned against the 15-hour days there. Whether he actually stacked wheat is unknown to me, but how could he have not?

By Gary Snyder's time machines baled the hay, and there were few haystacks (I just barely remember haystacks and strawstacks from the 50s):

He had driven half the night
From far down San Joaquin
Through Mariposa, up the
Dangerous Mountain roads,
And pulled in at eight a.m.
With his big truckload of hay
behind the barn.
With winch and ropes and hooks
We stacked the bales up clean
To splintery redwood rafters
High in the dark, flecks of alfalfa
Whirling through shingle-cracks of light,
Itch of haydust in the
sweaty shirt and shoes.
At lunchtime under Black oak
Out in the hot corral,
–The old mare nosing lunchpails,
Grasshoppers crackling in the weeds-
"I'm sixty-eight" he said,
"I first bucked hay when I was seventeen.
I thought, that day I started,
I sure would hate to do this all my life.
And dammit, that's just what I've gone and done."

In conclusion, I think that we can say that the stacking of wheat and hay, while not really a major literary theme, is more important than we would previously have thought, if we had thought about it at all.

Stacking Wheat and Things of that Kind, Part II

Buvard and Pecuchet, Gustave Flaubert.

Realism is just a phase in the long whine of the literati. Courbet always excepted, realism is satirical or polemical and has about as much to do with reality as romance novels do. When you read a realistic novel, it's always important to figure out The Moral of the Story. The moral of *Buvard and Pecuchet* is roughly as follows:

1. Copy clerks should continue to live as copy clerks even if they inherit tons of money. The self-education of copy clerks is a crime against nature.

2. Parvenus are morons and dumbshits who speak only in cliches, have no taste, and fuck everything up.

3. Parvenus shouldn't study agronomy, because they always fuck everything up. Same for medicine. It's impossible to learn to farm, and besides, who would ever want to try?

4. If a hailstorm destroys a parvenu's orchard or if fire destroys their haystack, it's because parvenus are morons and dumbshits.

Romance Novels

The Midwestern realists Hamlin Garland and Sinclair Lewis both started out as the authors of romance novels, and Garland quit only at the very end of his career. Here's Heinrich Von Kleist on romance novels in 1800 Würzburg:

> *Nowhere do we more readily receive an idea of the cultural level of a city and its prevailing tastes than in its reading libraries.*
>
> *Listen to what I encountered there, and I will say no more about the intellectual level of Würzburg:*
>
> *"We would like to have a couple of good things to read."*
> *"The collection is at your disposal."*
> *"Something of Wieland?"*
> *"I rather doubt it."*
> *"Or Schiller, or Goethe?"*
> *"They would be hard to find."*
> *"What! Are all of their books loaned out? Are the people here such readers?"*
> *"Hardly that."*
> *"Who are the most avid readers here?"*
> *"Lawyers, merchants, and married ladies."*
> *"And the unmarried ones?"*
> *"They may not borrow books."*
> *"And the students?"*

"We have been instructed not to give them any."
"Well, then, please tell us, if so little reading is done here, where in the world are the works of Goethe and Schiller?"
"By your leave, sir, such things are never read here."
"You mean, you do not have them here in your library?"
"They are not allowed".
"What sort of books are all these on the shelves, then?"
"Chivalric romances. Nothing but chivalric romances. On the right, chivalric romances with ghosts; on the left, chivalric romances without ghosts, as you prefer."
"Ah, I see."

Heinrich von Kleist, letter to Willhelmine von Zenge from Würzburg, Sept 13-18, 1800. (In *An Abyss Deep Enough,* tr. Miller*)*

We should never sneer at the romance novel, the most durable of literary forms. Romance novels have been written and read continuously since the beginning. St. Augustine complained about them, Dante complained about them, Cervantes complained about them, Kleist complained about them, but the romance novel is invulnerable and laughs at the whiners.

Realism, modernism, and postmodernism are just fads, whereas romance novels will still be around when New York, London, and Paris are crumbling wastelands swept by the wind.

The co-optation of cynicism

William MacAdams, *Ben Hecht: A Biography*.

Ben Hecht, *1001 Afternoons in Chicago.*

I.

Ben Hecht has been almost forgotten except by screenwriters, but he scripted some great movies (*Scarface, Front Page, Barbary Coast, Wuthering Heights, Monkey Business*) and because he was a complete master of the Hollywood cliche, script-doctored many more (*Stagecoach, Gone With the Wind, His Girl Friday, Roman Holiday, Angels with Dirty Faces,* etc. etc.).

Before Hollywood Hecht had been a Serious Author who wrote novels meant to be decadent in the European style, and before that he had been a newspaperman. His reporter's cynicism was equal to Mencken's, and all in all he thought that film was a debased, stupid medium.

And that's why he was so great. When he finally decided to switch teams and prostitute himself, his sharp awareness of the trite, cliche-ridden crappiness of film meant that he already knew the business. A sharp mind + cynicism + decadence + street smarts + a complete

contempt for the mass + a mercenary attitude + ability to write quickly = a scriptwriting genius.

Hecht was not the only decadent in Hollywood, of course. Mercenary European decadents flocked to Hollywood by the boatload (e.g. Franz Werfel, the author of dark expressionist poetry and the kitsch of *The Village of St. Bernadette*), and the horny, cynical, kitschy producers who really ran the show normally were of European origin: Goldwyn, Fox, Mayer, Laemmle, Zukor, the Warner brothers, et al. Hollywood's sophisticated, decadent mixture of puritanism and prurience (with tacked-on happy endings) is one of the wonders of world culture, and European realism, naturalism, and decadence all culminate in *noir.*

II.

Movies are all about storylines. What are Hecht's own storylines? I can find five — three of them movie cliches, two of them not.

1. Immigrants come to the US, struggle, do pretty well, and their American-born son fights his way to the top. Hecht's is in the Jewish category of this story, with the hard-working parents in the garment trade, etc., etc.

2. Young guy goes to the big city to make his fortune, the boss likes his looks, he has tough mentors but he proves himself, and he fights his way to the top in

a dirty business. (Can be merged with #1 or run freestanding).

3. Tough, cynical writer sells out, goes to Hollywood, big success, living large, wild and crazy, easy come, easy go. But in his heart he doesn't feel right about it. (Combined with one or both of the others or run freestanding). But Hecht never went to the bad the way some of the others (e. g. F. Scott) did.

4. Chicago (and the whole Midwest), formerly a cultural desert, suddenly becomes a literary center. *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The Little Review*, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, young Ernest Hemingway, young Kenneth Rexroth, even Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot: to say nothing of jazz. (Not yet a movie cliche).

5. Ten or twenty years late, American bumpkins decide they want be decadent: Ben Hecht, James Gibbons Huneker, James Branch Cabell. They publish novels no one reads any more, with H. L. Mencken cheering them on, and then mostly go on to other things. (Not yet a movie cliche).

III.

The Chicago Renaissance came and went. If the new York authorities ever mention the Chicago Renaissance, they mostly minimize its importance, and nothing comes out of white Chicago any more except

reactionary academic ideology. But things did happen there once: it was there that naturalism and decadence went pop. The French naturalists were fussy sorts who thought that even their own servants were exotic and strange, and their novels were based on Research. By contrast, Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* was based on one of his courtesan sisters (he had two), and Hecht's *noir* was grounded in yellow journalism (with a touch of Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris)*. When Hecht's *noir* mix of decadence and yellow journalism went to Hollywood, the world changed. And then *noir* film was discovered by the French, who didn't realize where it had come from.

Stephen Dedalus's Dubliners

Dubliners is Dublin as Stephen Dedalus was able to see it. The Dubliners of that time could not have been as uniformly pitiful, mediocre, and unworthy of respect as Dedalus shows them to have been. *Dubliners* is realism, but it's tendentious and symbolist realism, with obsessive-compulsive tics which only got worse during Dedalus's later career. (Not that there are any other kinds of realism).

Realism supposedly mean "showing things as they really are" or something like that, but what a can of worms that turned out to be! First it meant stories about actuality (including the ugly aspects of actuality) as opposed to stories about imaginary ideal worlds. So far, so good. Then some writers (Flaubert) came to think that a perfectly-written novel would show the Real Truth of a situation, rather than just being a story. Then others (Ibsen) came to think that the truth of realism would motivate people to make the world a better place. Still others (Zola) titillated their audiences with masses of vivid but unpleasant detail leading to some sort of point.

Dedalus's work was the climax, and he trumped Balzac and Flaubert by claiming that certain privileged instants ("epiphanies"), when properly written up, showed you the very truth of the very truth. This was all just the return of idealism. Actuality is crap, but Writing is truth. The cesspool of human life transfigured by Art.

To what was Dublin being invidiously contrasted? Not anywhere ever on the face of this earth. You could have made a tour of the other second-rate capitals of Europe, from Christiana to Helsingfors to Vilnius or whatever they called it then to Cracow or whatever they called it then to Brunn to Laibach to Barcelona or whatever they called it then, and you'd find Dedaluses at every stop grumbling about provincialism, puritanism, and mediocrity. And don't think that it was any different in the great capitals; grumbling is what realists do.

Catholicism had taught Dedalus that ours is a fallen, degraded, crappy world, but it had also had given him a way of dealing with that world. After he had discarded the Catholic coping mechanisms he still faced the degradation, and that's what he wrote about. Progressives and radicals had tried to convince him that the crappy world of actuality could be made better by politics, but he couldn't believe that (especially not in Ireland) so he just documented the crappiness. Dedalus has been praised for his Olympian detachment, but it was the Olympian detachment of a hanging judge. Scarcely a single character in *Dubliners* is worthy of any respect at all, except perhaps for Dedalus's version of the pious spinster servant girl, and only a few are even blameless victims. The Irish have been branded as provincial and chauvinist for their initial rejection of Dedalus's writing, but what else could they have done?

Realism is sometimes thought of as a protest against poverty and oppression, but usually it wasn't, certainly not in this case. This is bourgeois liberal stuff. Dedalus's subject is the lower middle class and its hangers-on, and the Irish peasantry and proletariat only get brutish walk-on parts. In the bourgeois liberal world, everyone is equal and has his or her shot at the ideal, but that chance is an infinitesimal one. The more ideal something is, the less attainable it is, and winners are so few and far between that when they happen to show up they have no idea what to do next and often go to the bad. The competitive middle-class world with its infinite opportunity offers no role models for happiness. It's like the Olympics – globalized competition makes one poor bastard the world champion while consigning billions of others to defeat. Winning isn't the most important thing, it's the only thing.

Dedalus actually did become world champion, but only posthumously, so he had no chance to enjoy it and probably couldn't have done so if he'd had a chance. On the way up he developed perfectionist tics. In its ancient beginnings fiction had been a rough product hacked out for a penny a word, but gradually it became a prestige item. Talented people like Dedalus, who once would have going into in serious fields like law or divinity, started committing to fiction right off at the beginning, and while they were still quite young they had learned all the tricks that Balzac and Dumas and Tolstoy and Flaubert had spent years of their lives discovering.

Writing fiction became too easy, and out of boredom and self-doubt Dedalus and his peers, like Nietzsche, had to make things difficult for themselves.

Dedalus's first tic was symbolism. Fiction, including realist fiction, had always invested undue importance in selected particulars. A story is not just something that happened, it tells you something important. Seemingly commonplace events in novels are all symbols, and Dedalus lays it on thick. For example, as a helpful scholar has explained, the pious spinster's route on a shopping trip takes the shape of a cross -- something which probably not be perceived by an ordinary reader even if he was familiar with the Dublin street plan. There's tons of that stuff. This is weirdly reminiscent of the old *Dick Tracy* comic strip, where the artist attached explanatory written labels to some of the things he had drawn, but it doesn't make any sense. Even if it's Christmas day, what does shopping for cakes have to do with the crucifixion? Christmas isn't even the right holiday.

Dedalus's second tic, fanaticism about the details of real-world Dublin, makes the novelist's job more complicated and also responds to doubts about the truth of fiction. How can fiction be true? For example, for a couple of decades Balzac worked twelve-hour days and write four novels a year. He couldn't possibly have spent enough time out in the world to actually know what was going on there and had to have been extrapolating wildly.

Balzac justified his overreach via a kind of spiritualism, whereby with a single glance into a family's living room he could learn enough to tell their whole story, as if telepathically. This is already Dedalus's epiphany, more or less, but the truth of Balzac's claim is not at all obvious. The suspicion that novelists are just making shit up will always be there, and that's really just as it should be.

Presumably it was after Dedalus had panicked about whether his writing really did capture the truth of Dublin that he became absurdly punctilious about the names of places and of streets, about the details of the shrubbery, about the exact dates of this and that, about the weather and phase of the moon on a given day, and so on. He was trying to silence his doubts about the truth of writing, but his efforts were vain. He had to know that the big questions – for example, whether the Dubliners were really as miserable as he portrayed them to be – had nothing to do with the names of pubs or the distances between them or the exact number of steps in a stairway. It was just OC, hough I suppose that he was better off than if he'd been picking at his ear until it started to bleed or rocking back and forth chanting nonsense syllables.

Third World Joyce

When I was in school James Joyce was much feared by English majors. Without having read any of his books, based on the demeanor of those teaching him I presumed that he was a snobbish pedant leaching off the declining aristocracy. For this and other reasons, I didn't get very far in Literary Studies (as English was then being renamed) and I didn't read Joyce until much later. English departments were odd places in those days -- full of nostalgia for the Mother Church, the knights of old, Old World elegance, and the Confederate States of America. What finally convinced me to study something else was the Melville expert who, after explaining to me that Billy Budd had it coming to him, looked straight at me in a funny way and I imagined the rope tightening around my neck.

Joyce started as a realist and, amazingly, an Ibsenist. While all of his work (before *Finnegans Wake* anyway) kept to the realist program of portraying reality unsentimentally and as it really was, what was missing in his mature work was Ibsenist indignation and reformism Other Ibsenists, notably George Bernard Shaw, seemed to believe that the accurate portrayal of a situation might lead to its improvement. But Joyce, though he had no apparent right-wing sympathies, seemingly found no hope of any kind.

In those days I especially disliked the dense literary reference underlying his fiction, but I am a pedant now myself, and no longer one of the Plain People of America, so that doesn't bother me any more, and by now I am much more receptive than I was. Joyce's protagonist (and self-portrait) Stephen Dedalus is portrayed as a stiff, prickly sort, but not really as a social-climbing snob, and in any case Joyce's detached portrayal of the unappealing Stephen makes you suspect that he was not completely happy with his own younger self. In what I've read so far, Joyce's characters are almost all middle class or below, and while an air of enormous unfulfillment and anticlimax pervades what I've seen, it's not the kind of thing which would be alleviated by marrying a duchess, living in a castle, and having servants.

Joyce's characters are snuffy and ordinary and their stories are sad and anti-climactic. In "Araby" a kid wants terribly to go to a fair but only gets there when everything's closing down. Nothing happens in "The Dead", except that the husband unexpectedly finds out that his wife of many years had never really loved him. In that story a singer has high aspirations, but we know that it's already too late for her. In the *Portrait* Stephen's father vaguely hopes that Stephen will be a great half-miler, but no one really takes that seriously. The dead Parnell is honored (by most), but no one takes his place. Even if there is a bit of drama, it does not rise to tragedy but is just sort of awful (as the snotty young Stephen pointed out in a general philosophical way).

For me the oddest twist in the Joyce story is the third-world Joyce. Ireland was a British colony during most of Joyce's life, and Joyce accurately portrays the paradoxes of the dual economy. The English characters have property, and the Irish have debts. The English characters get what they pay for, and the Irish characters borrow. Stephen's employer, Mr. Deasy:

> *"Do you know what is the proudest word you will ever hear from an Englishman's mouth? .... I will tell you: 'I paid my way. I never borrowed a shilling in my life' .... Can you say that?"*

Stephen then mentally counts up his debts to a dozen people -- the largest to his good friend Buck Mulligan, whom he dislikes intensely. The Englishman Haines, a Celticist whom they sponge off of and mostly also dislike, has to remind them to pay the old woman who brings the milk every day. She keeps her accounts quaintly in her head: "Well it's seven mornings a pint at twopence is seven twos is a shilling and twopence over and these three mornings a quart at fourpence is three quarts is a shilling and one and two is two and two sir". They short her twopence and that's fine: "Time enough, she said, taking the coin". A debtor herself, she could only be indulgent to her fellows. Multiply it out, and you have the whole colony.

A central theme of Joyce's, unexpected by me at least, is love. The only character I've seen so far whom Joyce clearly despised is "Mr. James Duffy", a leftist-Nietszchean bachelor (George Bernard Shaw?) who, on general philosophical principles, rejects the love of the unhappily-married Mrs. Sinico, and we saw above that loss of love is also the theme of "The Dead". What Joyce found lacking in modern life, so it seems, was not elegance, nobility, drama, or excitement, but love.

Even at the beginning Joyce was tired of the traditional fictional ways. He writes what people see, hear, say, think, and feel. You don't get the normal explanations, descriptions, and narrative setups. The stories barely have plots, aren't exciting, and don't wrap up tidily. You are writing about a world in which the characters themselves are missing the meaning, and Stephen Dedalus's struggles in this respect are exhaustively portrayed. The author is just as present in Joyce's works as he is in stories which are more conventionally plotted and told, but what he is silently telling us is different.

Joyce's inability to engage himself in the kinds of stories written by earlier novelists (even Flaubert) is philosophical. Stephen's Thomist education tended to devalue particulars in the face of the philosophical and religious universals. Joyce's naturalistic modernism also

tended to unfocus storytelling. Ultimately Joyce ended up folding everything he knew into one archetypal universal non-story, Finnegans Wake.

Originally I was going to insert a bit from Finnegans Wake here, along with my own moral of the story: "In the end Joyce lost it." But if you read it as the book of a sad, sweet, learned man who had lost all faith in the given meanings and was just rather desperately farting around, Finnegans Wake isn't that bad:

> *Didn't you spot her in her windaug, wubbling up on an osiery chair, with a meusic before her all cunniform letters, pretending to ribble a reedy derg on a fiddle she bogan without a band on? Sure she can't fiddan a dee, with bow or abandon! Sure, she can't! Tista suck. Well, I never now heard the like of that! Tell me moher. Tell me moatst*.

So anyway, it's a pity I didn't read Joyce long ago. I blame the teachers. Perhaps one of these days someone will end up giving Joyce the second look he deserves.

The difference between Leopold Bloom and Fiorello LaGuardia is that LaGuardia wasn't Catholic.

When James Joyce arrived in Austrian-controlled Trieste in 1904 at the age of 22, the American consul thereabouts was the future NYC mayor (and airport namesake) Fiorello LaGuardia, who was also 22 and who would remain at that post for another couple of years. Like Leopold Bloom, LaGuardia was of Hungarian Jewish descent (on his mother's side).

LaGuardia was raised as an Episcopalian in Arizona, and Bloom was also raised as an Episcopalian of sorts: has father had been converted to Christianity by the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, an Anglican evangelical group, and the church he joined had been the Anglican-affiliated Church of Ireland, just as the church LaGuardia's atheist father joined after he married LaGuardia's mother had been the Anglican-affiliated American Episcopal Church.

However, when it came time to marry, the adult Leopold Bloom left the Church of Ireland to become a Catholic, which is something that LaGuardia never would have done.

For the father, breakfast was
the most important meal of the day.

Fur den Vater war das Fruhstuch die wichtigste Mahlzeit des Tages.

Franz Kafka *Die Verwandlung*

Der Mensch ist, was er isst.

Ludwig Feuerbach

Herr Samsa's 1915 statement of this principle is he earliest I have been able to find, but all things considered, I do not regard him as a reliable guide. However, the staying power of this cliche is really quite remarkable.

Feuerbach's materialist maxim has also proven amazingly durable, though oddly enough it is with spiritualistic New Age diet and health cults that it has been the most popular.

Who Wrote This?
I

"Is it true that you're going away?"
"Yes, in a few minutes".
She repeated:
"In a few minutes?... and for good?... Shall we never see you again?"
Sobs choked her.
"Good -bye! Good-bye! Kiss me, please."
And she clasped him fiercely in her arms.

a. Danielle Steele, *To Love Again.*
b. Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind.*
c. Gustave Flaubert, *Sentimental Education.*
d. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre.*

II

They embraced each other, her small body was burning in his hands; they rolled a few paces in an unconscious state from which he repeatedly but vainly tried to rescue himself, bumped dully against the door, and then lay in the small puddles of beer and other rubbish with which the floor was covered. Hours passed there, hours breathing together with a single heartbeat, hours in which he felt he was lost or had wandered farther in foreign lands than any human being before him….

a. Nelson Algren, *A Walk on the Wild Side.*
b. Franz Kafka, *The Castle*.
c. Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead.*
d. Grace Metalious, *Peyton Place.*

To encourage the authors

"Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Samuel Johnson

Dans ce pay-ci, il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un amiral pour encourager les autres.

Voltaire

People are always saying that the arts don't do well under censorship, but actually art and literature flourished under the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs and under the Czars. They even flourished under Russian Communism — I have friends who read Russian and they're always discovering great new Soviet authors.

By contrast, under conditions of freedom most American literature is crap. The obvious solution would be to kill an American author every once in awhile. I have a few names in mind.

Germinie Lacerteaux

I am a well-born man of letters, and for me the People (or you might say, the rabble) fascinate me like unknown and undiscovered tribes, a taste of the "exotic" which explorers, enduring great suffering, go looking for in distant lands.

Edmond de Goncourt

The backstory is the good part here. The Goncourts were wealthy aristocrats. When their devoted family servant Rose Malingre (tr. "Rose, thou art sick") died in 1865, they found that for many years she had been stealing from them, using the money to buy absinthe and cavort with her brutish gigolo.

Theft, absinthe and a brutish gigolo — sounds like a cool, decadent, liberated thing to do, right? But it was *their money*, and only aristocratic and bohemian men are supposed to do that kind of thing. So they took their pitiful revenge by writing a novel in which Rose / Germinie dies a horrible death even worse than her actual death.

Flaubert's later story "*Un coeur simple"*, was also about a saintly, devoted servant, but this one did not steal from her masters. It's Flaubert's only story portraying an

admirable character, and we must assume that it was his little *neener neener* to the Goncourts.

Flaubert and the Goncourts loved the exotic, but to them the house servants they had known since childhood were exotic. The Goncourts' exotic servant comes to a lurid bad end, whereas Flaubert's exotic servant is saintly and impossible, but clearly neither of them had passed the threshold beyond which it became possible for the literati to imagine that servants are human beings.

Novel Reading made simple

In the *ombres* and *ténèbres* of the early pages of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* everything is *pale, fané, mate,* or *jauni.* There are no actual colors, just *âtre* colors (-*ish* colors): *jaunâtre, blanchâtre, verdâtre, bleuâtre, noirâtre, gris sale,* and *horrible brune.* As for the *boiseries d'un vert bouteille* and *peletons de laine vert,* you just have to guess that Zola didn't like green at all. But finally, 29 pages in, you get a real color: *par ses lèvres entrouvertes on apercevait des clartés roses dans sa bouche.* You just know that this devil woman is going to start ruining men's lives.

The overall message of this novel is that if you kill the husband in order to get the wife, you thereby *become the husband* and she stops wanting to have sex with you. In this book they actually did get married after murdering the husband, but that wasn't necessary. The bond between crime partners in the shadow of the guillotine is just as bad as the bond of marriage.

I get the point. Husbands of the world, rest easy in your beds! You need fear nothing from me, at least not on your lovely wife's account. No incubus / succubus for me! Because it turns out that whenever we'd be together afterwards we'd sense the presence of your clammy, decomposing corpse, which would also haunt our dreams. You can have her!

I'd known about ghosts and haunts already, from *Strange Stories From a Chinese Studio, Saxo Grammaticus, The Golden Ass,* and *Njal's Saga*, but it's nice to have confirmation from a positivist like Zola.

Before Ayn Rand and Nietzsche was La Païva

Grandes Horizontales, Virginia Rounding, Bloomsbury, 2003

At table she expounded a frightening theory of will-power, saying that everything was the result of an effort of the will, that there were no such things as fortuitous circumstances, that one created one's own circumstances, and that unfortunate people were so only because they did not want to stop being unfortunate….She spoke of a woman who, in order to attain some unspecified aim, shut herself up for three years, completely cut off from the world, scarcely eating anything and often forgetting about food, walled up within herself and entirely given over to the plan she was developing. And then she concluded: "I was that woman".

Goncourts, p. 134 , January 3, 1868.

La Païva (Esther Pauline Thérèse Lachmann, Mme. Villoing, Mme. la Marquise de Païva, Countess Henckel von Donnersmarck) was perhaps the most eminent of the courtesans of Second Empire France, famous for bleeding her lovers dry. Courtesans who succeeded in making themselves the objects of bidding

wars were able do very well for themselves, and La Païva married several aristocrats and spent the last years of her life (and an embalmed afterlife) in her final husband's castle.

When La Païva declared her metaphysic of the will in the passage above, Nietzsche was only 24 years old and had published nothing, so the direction of influence is presumably in the other direction. As for Ayn Rand, La Païva seems like a much more likely teacher and role model for her than for Nietzsche, given Nietzsche's notable lack of worldly success. Like La Païva, Ayn Rand was an unobservant Russian Jew who successfully reinvented herself in a hostile foreign environment. Rand's first book (in Russian) was the biography of another self-made woman who triumphed in a strange land: the Polish vamp and *femme fatale* Pola Negri.

While she lived with the pianist Herz between 1842 and 1846, La Païva became friends with the musicians von Bülow and Wagner. These men, who successively married Franz Liszt's daughter Cosima in 1857 and 1870, were both close to Nietzsche from 1868 to 1872 (during which period Nietzsche also became obsessed with Cosima). In 1868, the above statement of La Païva's philosophy was made, Cosima was involved with Wagner, still married to von Bülow, and flirting with Nietzsche. Thus, Cosima was the most likely

channel by which Païvism reached Nietzsche, though as far as we know there is no documentary evidence for Cosima's Païvism (or Lou Salomé's either.)

The sex life of the 19th century

Monsieur Blanchard was his name, I can still remember...... He had this big château and all on the Riviera, in Europe, and all he did in his spare time was beat women off with a club. He was a real rake and all, but he knocked women out. He said, in this one part, that a woman's body is like a violin and all, and that it takes a terrific musician to play it right.

Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*

I wish I had a pencil thin mustache....

Jimmy Buffett

"Rodolphe and Marcel" sneered Champfleury [to Murger]. *"Have you ever met anybody called Rodolphe or Marcel? Why not Ethelred or Lodoiska?"*

Baldick, p. 109.

Passion is not chosen, but something that happens to you -- a mix of pain and pleasure involving loss of control. Passion is secret, non-social but also non-individual, the escape of two individuals from

the routine and boring, and must be expressed "inside" (or to a degree, "outside" among strangers), but must be dissembled and occluded among friends and in society. It is widely accepted that for many passion is the very meaning of life, and for them, the public world of strangers will always be a place for falling in love and seduction.

(Anonymous summary of Raymonde Carroll's *Cultural Misunderstandings).*

During my youth it was customary to deplore American sexual puritanism, which was contrasted to the urbane wisdom and comfortable acceptance of sex characteristic of every other culture. Continental culture and Latin lovers were admired above all others, and a whole generation of Americans, like so many Bovaries, either pined for suave Rodolphes, or aspired to become one.

Upon examination, none of these sexual Utopias (continental or otherwise) really pan out. Like the weather, sexuality has turned out to be an enormous, unsolvable hairy ball problem whose deep-rooted systemic difficulties are not susceptible to being fixed: you can move the bald spot around, but you can never make it disappear. So while it is true that liberated America has not attained or even approximated the continental model of sexual felicity (or any of the others),

given what we know now that's probably just as well. America's enthusiastic plunge into liberation had both its good points and its bad points: after all, people do fuck more, probably, and without the sexual revolution we would never have developed our present wealth of therapy.

The French were the most admired of the continental sexualists, and in what is written below, which is primarily based on the evidence found in the works, the biographies, and the gossip of famous French authors, I will take the French nineteenth century as a type case of sexual liberation.

I

> *But romantic love had a definite date: it sprang up during the Middle Ages on the day when some person or persons conceived the idea of absorbing love into a kind of supernatural feeling, into religious emotion as created by Christianity and launched a new religion into the world. When critics reproach mysticism with expressing itself in the same terms as passionate love, they forget that it was love that began by plagiarizing mysticism, borrowing from it its fervor, its raptures, its ecstasies; in using the language of the passion it had transfigured, mysticism was only resumed possession of its own. We may add that the nearer love is to adoration, the greater the disproportion between the emotion and the object, the deeper*

therefore the disappointment to which the lover is exposed -- unless he decides that he will ever look at the object through the mist of the emotion and never touch it, that he will, in a word, treat it religiously.

Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,* p. 42.

Recently a letter was published in one of the women's magazines asking how the writer should deal with her young man. He had told her that he would only happily marry a virgin. He pointed out that he could not possibly know for certain that she was pure unless he had sexual intercourse with her. This letter may, in fact, have been written by the editor but it poses a riddle that men are only slowly ceasing to try to solve.

Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, p. 62.

The trouble is I have read too much; I have taken the inventions of the poets too seriously and have made a Laura or a Beatrice out of an ordinary woman of our century.

Gérard de Nerval (tr. Sieburth), in "Aurelia", *Selected Writings*, p. 266.

I'm chasing after an image, nothing more.

Nerval in "Sylvie", *Selected Writings*, p. 147.

Though it built on a long tradition of French libertinism and European erotic mysticism, the eroticism of the various Rodolphes was developed during the romantic era. Because of the distractions of revolution and Empire romanticism came to the French only in the 1820s, and while the earliest French romantics played it straight (as Victor Hugo continued to do for decades), during the 1830s and afterwards the bourgeois realities of life pushed French romantics into the forms of flamboyant excess and defiant absurdity that we call bohemian or avant-garde.

A degree of detachment, self-doubt, and self-ridicule was central to bohemianism, which to a certain degree was just *epater le bourgeois,* a marketing trick. The bohemians first came into public view in two books which poked fun at the movements to which their authors had belonged: Théophile Gautier's *Les Jeunes-France* and Henry Murger's *Scènes de la Vie Bohême*. And even though Gautier and George Sand were romantics by almost any standard, Gautier's Chevalier d'Albert and Sand's Horace Dumentot (the flamingly romantic

Rodolphes in Gautier's *Mademoiselle Maupin,* 1836, and Sand's *Horace,* 1842) cannot be taken seriously. These remarkable books all deserve a fuller treatment than I give them here, where I limit myself to using their protagonists as foundational type cases of kind of Latin lover that Holden Caulfield vaguely wished he was.

> "A *woman in confinement is for me the epitome of the horrible*"
>
> Horace Dumentot in *Horace* (George Sand, tr. Rogow) p.192.

> *Horace, who had one of the more impressionable imaginations of an already impressionable era, living more on fiction than reality, looked at his new mistress through the various character types that his reading had left in his head.. But although these types were charming in poems and novels, they were not real and living in present-day reality.*
>
> *Horace,* p. 195.

> *I aspire to a sublime love, I only experience a wretched one. I yearn to embrace the ideal, and I only grasp the reality.*
>
> *Horace,* p. 148.

"Jean", cried Horace, "you don't know what it's like to love for the first time, and to be loved for the second or third". "Ah now we have it," said Larivinière," shrugging his shoulders. "Only the Virgin Mary is worthy of Monsieur Horace Dumontet!"

Horace, p. 182.

At the beginning of George Sand's novel *Horace* (1840) we meet Horace Dumentot, whose aspirations are boundless even though he is a provincial bourgeois and not a wealthy one. Initially he is a rather attractive figure -- good looking, talented, and extraordinarily idealistic and ambitious. However, in the course of the novel he also shows himself to be egotistical, narcissistic, foppish, fatuous, selfish, inconsiderate, snobbish, clueless, petulant, lazy, sponging, heartless, cruel, delusional, and completely impractical, and in the end, just to get rid of him, a friend gives him money to go to Italy. But he is indeed a romantic lover, because despite being unable to love anyone, he loves Love as passionately as others love Truth or Democracy or Freedom or Justice or God or France or some actual woman.

Horace's love affair with the beautiful and affectionate but low-born Marthe ends badly partly just because did not actually want her (a commoner who had not been a virgin when he had met her) but mostly

because he felt only contempt for flesh and blood women as such. Romantic conquests were a conventional *rite de passage* for young men of his type, and Marthe had been a necessary part of his self-advancement program, but his interest ended there: his campaign required that he proceed onward to greater conquests. H could only love an ideal women: the ambitious love he had learned from books was just a version of the romantic the pursuit of the impossible, the unattainable, and the unreal. The physical realities of sexual relationships horrified him, especially pregnancy and the need to earn a living. (Not only would he himself never work, he regarded anyone who ever had a job as servile and base, and he even despises his lover when she gets a job in order to support the two of them).

Chevalier d'Albert is likewise in love only with love itself and was really only capable of loving an ideal woman, but he is additionally aware that the ideal woman for him would have to have enough money of her own to support him in style, and he is consciously a dowry hunter.

> *I cannot imagine a beautiful woman without a carriage, horses, serving-men, and all that belongs to an income of four thousand a year: there is a harmony between beauty and wealth.*

> *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: Théophile Gautier, tr. Constantine, p. 14. (Elsewhere

the Chevalier speaks of a beautiful woman as a necessity of life, like a good horse or a good dog).

Up to the present, I have not loved any woman, but I have loved and do love – love..... I have not loved this woman or that, one more than another; but someone who I've never seen, who must live somewhere, and whom I must find.

Maupin, p. 12.

I am jealous of what does not exist.

Maupin, p. 19.

Very often the kisses she receives are not for her; it is the idea of another woman that is embraced in her person.....

Maupin, p. 57.

Yet if the woman of our dreams is impossible to the conditions of human nature, what is it that causes us to love only her and none other, since we are men and our instinct should be an infallible guide?

Maupin, p. 21.

How could a real woman, eating or drinking, getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, however adorable and full of charm she might otherwise be compared with a creature such as this?

Maupin, p. 23.

Most of the main traits of the standard continental Rodolphe are manifest in one or both of these two men: the erotic obligation, Platonism and the rejection of the actual, the confusion of women with property and of love with ambition, and extreme doubts about marriage and carnality (the latter often expressed in medical terms). Many of the attitudes of these idealized and idealizing fictional characters were also held, to a greater of lesser degree, by the male authors of the time.

II

In France one may speak of one's amorous conquests without shocking anyone. We have, in France, a great deal of indulgence and admiration for the "irresistible" man or woman, for "charmers" large and small of both cases. Seduction is an art which is learned and perfected. It is not enough to be handsome or beautiful to seduce; a certain intelligence and expertise are necessary, which can only be learned by long

apprenticeship, even if this apprenticeship begins in the most tender infancy.

Raymonde Carroll*, Cultural Misunderstandings,* pp. 132-3.

For the French authors of the nineteenth century an active sex life was, like a presentable dress-coat, one of the minimum criteria for social viability. Poor Saint-Beuve:

Saint-Beuve is one of the most interesting examples of the deficiency of character produced in a man by a deficiency in his genital organs.

Goncourts, p. 202.

Marriage was not required, and sex with one's wife didn't count toward your quota. Many or perhaps most of them (except for Victor Hugo) cheated on their studly obligation one way or another; the church of the libertine was accepting and forgiving. As with the fictional characters above, these author's preferences were, on the one hand, for inaccessible women (succubi, women long dead, and imaginary and fictitious women) and on the other hand, for forbidden women outside the dowry system: other men's wives, courtesans, lorettes, grisettes, and so on down the line.

One of the anomalies of nineteenth century French literature is that what we normally read today from that period is the work of its less successful authors (except for Victor Hugo): poems, *belles-lettres*, and novels. But the history of the period tells us that by far the most successful authors of the period were dramatists and opera librettists whose works are almost forgotten now. Many of the poets we now read were able to eke out a bare living only by writing reviews of those silly plays.

These plays were not literature; they scripts for a discreet form of porn which allowed men to escape from the real world of dowries and marriage into an imaginary world of freedom and love. These plays gave men a chance to fall in love with lovely, skimpily-dressed women on stage feigning passion. The bolder of them courted the lead actress at the stage door, and the more prosperous of them hired her. Others chased the supporting actresses, the chorus girls and the walk-ons, as well as women sitting in the audience for that purpose. This dream world was fully monetized under the control of well-dowried rentiers, but it did provide an escape valve for the various sorts of male and female losers of the dowry game.

> *The names of two thousand "fallen women" were entered on a list kept in the archives of the Royal Academy of Music, and during the week preceding*

every ball complimentary tickets were sent to these ladies, who turned the Opera into a vast love-market.

Robert Baldick, *The First Bohemian*, p. 19.

M. Hiltbrunner, the manager of the Theatre des Delassements, said one day to the architect Chabouiller "Monsieur, my theater is a brothel".

"Oh, come now, Monsieur!"

"No, I mean it. It's all very simple. I pay my actresses only fifty or sixty francs per month. My rent is thirty thousand francs a year, so I can't give them any more. My actors don't get much more than that, and they're all pimps and fairies. Often one of the women comes to see me and says that fifty francs isn't enough, and that she'll have to start picking up men in the audience at five sous a time.... but there's nothing that I can do about it: my rent is thirty thousand francs a year."

Goncourts, pp. 14-15

From the stage to the auditorium, from the wings to the stage, from the auditorium to the stage, and from one side of the auditorium to the other, invisible threads crisscross between dancers legs,

> *actresses' smiles, and spectator's opera glasses, presenting an overall picture of Pleasure, Orgy, and Intrigue. It would be impossible to gather together in a smaller space a greater number of sexual stimulants, of invitations to copulation. It is like a Stock Exchange dealing with women's nights.*

Goncourts, p. 68

Most of the famous authors of the era were on the wrong side of the dowry game and unworthy of a decent wife, and like many of the characters in their novels, they dreaded marriage and often avoided it entirely. Always excepting the monster Victor Hugo, few of them even seem to have been particularly enthusiastic about the carnal act itself, and many of them found it disgusting or perilous. Like St. Augustine and Plato, they loved love and desired desire -- the absence, the anticipation, and the reputation, but not the consummation. What they really wanted to do was write books, and idealization and unsatisfied desire were helpful for that purpose.

> *Balzac's thriftiness in the expenditure of sperm: he was perfectly happy playing the love game up to the point of ejaculation, but he was unwilling to go any further. Sperm for him was an emission of cerebral matter and, as it were, a waster of creative power....*

Goncourts, p. 343, quoting Zola.

Zola: "I can't see a girl like that go by without saying to myself: 'Isn't that worth more than a book?'"

Goncourts, pp. *215-216.*

When the conversation turns from women of the theatre to women in general, Flaubert remarks "I've found a simple way of doing without them. I just lie face down, and during the night.... it's infallible"....

Goncourts, p. 45.

As a young man, away from home for the first time, Flaubert was "imperiously possessed" of the idea of castrating himself.

Geoffrey Wall, "Introduction" to
Flaubert's *Three Tales.*

'You know, old fellow', my dizzy brain says to the sensualist in me "it is quite possible that today the little convulsion will be accompanied by the last, and the little death will bring on the great' .

Goncourts, p. 291.

There is one unfortunate thing about all this, and that is that neither Flaubert, for all his bragging about such matters, nor Zola, nor I have ever been seriously in love and that we are all incapable of describing love.

Goncourts, p. 232.

[Flaubert] went on to say that he had never really possessed a woman. That he was a virgin, and that he had used all the women he had had as a mattress for another woman, the woman of his dreams.

Goncourts, p. 95

One week of love disgusts us for three months and we come out of it spiritually sick and physically weary, dead to desire and filled with a vague, ineffable, infinite sadness.... Nothing but ash is left to us of the fruit we have squeezed. We despair of ever feeling desire again suffering from a moral indigestion brought on by debauchery. Everything stinks in our hearts....

Goncourts, p. 17.

That man has missed something who has never left a brothel at sunrise feeling like throwing himself in the river out of pure disgust.

Flaubert, cited in Markson.

"A woman [*femme*, wife]*, that's what I've always lacked", [Delacroix] said. "I've always had such a high idea of womanhood that I would undoubtedly have lost it. Now that I make the final reckoning, I think that all is well...."*

Houssaye, p. 312.

The ideal woman was passionate, impossibly beautiful, unattainable or nearly so, without needs or demands, sterile, and generally silent. Actual women were merely shabby substitutes for this imaginary women. When an unattainable woman became attainable, she lost her power (as Apollonie Sabatier found out). At first Baudelaire was devoted to Apollonie and took her for his Muse:

> *"Woman is the Being for whom but especially through whom, artists create their work....a divinity, a star that presides over all the parturitions of the male brain*"

But after they had finally made love, after a long passive-aggressive courtship by Baudelaire, he rejected her:

> *She had destroyed, for ever, the image of* la Muse et la Madone*, the aura of the unattainable. Baudelaire had worshiped her as an ideal; now he saw that she was merely a woman.... 'You see, my beauty, my dear, that I have hateful prejudices about women'.*

Richardson, *The Courtesans*, p. 178.

The ideal woman was, in fact, physically impossible, since she had no needs:

"There is nothing more beautiful than a little working girl who has a lover like me and is content with her lot.... a simple flower girl who thinks of nothing but her flowers and her love.... the eighth marvel of the world because she is happy without money .... Athénaïs is pure as the driven snow".

Houssaye, p. 83. (Athénaïs very shortly betrays the speaker with a rich man. There is an identical story in Murger).

He is only at ease with princesses. They are very happy, they have no wants, they are splendidly dressed, which pleases him. The rest of women disgust him.

Richardson, *Théophile Gautier*, p. 193 (citing Eugenie Fort, the mother of Théophile Gautier Jr. The princess is Princess Mathilde Bonaparte).

But sometimes the idealism got kinkier than that:

We went on to women, the usual subject of conversation. Gautier said that the only woman that really attracted him was the asexual woman,

> *that is to say the woman so young that she banishes all ideas of childbearing and obstetrics; and he added that since he was unable to satisfy this penchant, on account of the police, all other women, whether they were twenty or fifty years old, were the same age to him.*
>
> Goncourts, p. 95.

> *Zola, who had said nothing so far, suddenly complained of being haunted by the desire to go to bed with a young girl -- not a child, but a girl who was not yet a woman. "Yes", he said, "it frightens me.... I see the Assize Court and all the rest of it."*
>
> Goncourts, p. 236.

Especially after France's 1871 military defeat, which was widely blamed on loose women and horny men, several of these idealizing writers came to express the grossest misogyny. To the Goncourts the common run of uneducated women were "*evil and stupid animals fit only for breeding",* whereas Baudelaire described women as *"vulgar", "natural"* (not a good thing in Baudelaire's eyes), and *"abominable"* (Rounding pp. 150-1). Dumas *fils* spoke of prostitution as *a colossal beast with seven heads and ten horns,* and DuCamp spoke of it as a *gangrene rising from the lower depths of society.* In *Nana* Zola describes the terrible death throes of his courtesan title character (as bad as Emma's) with enormous

enthusiasm, likening her to a "*blind power of nature*", a "*leaven of destruction*", and *"a vector of disease*" . (Rounding pp. 266, 275).

All the cheating merely tells you how relentless and brutal the laws of marriage and dowry were. These were laws which could be evaded but not defied. Even the most free-spirited of men might end up caught in the trap. Houssaye and the lovely Marie Garcia tried to play both sides and live openly together outside marriage, but failed:

> *Marie and I attempted the impossible: to try and disarm the strictures of public opinion; but Paris itself does not permit those who have not been properly signed and sealed to be happy. It seems to challenge those who have not gone through the legal formalities. Poets, up in the clouds, disdain the laws of the real world, but since I had descended from Olympus to the precise world of Paris, I heard the imprecations. My family crossed themselves and consecrated me to hell.*
>
> Houssaye, p. 272.

When Prince Belgiojoso, the famous rake, finally settled down with one of his conquests, according to his unsympathetic buddy Musset this blunder destroyed him:

Alfred de Musset told Caroline Jaubert "The Prince has only himself to blame. When one has his temperament, one should not remain tied to the same woman for so many years". .... from now on Emilio led an aimless, drifting existence until he died.

Gattey, Charles Neilson, *A Bird of Curious Plumage*, p. 77.

Daudet and Zola played around while married, and by consequence they lived in terror:

Daudet then ventured an apology. Mme. Daudet just replied: "I felt like killing myself but I thought of our child.... but I warn you that if it happens again I shall kill myself". She was a Breton and quite capable of doing that. And Daudet added: "That's what comes of being caught out, my good fellow. I have been stripped of all my power; my wife goes through my post every morning, throwing out all the letters from women into the fire; and so on and so forth."

Goncourts, p. 259.

Zola confessed that for two years he had gone in fear of seeing himself splashed with the blood of his children and his mistress, murdered by his wife...

Goncourts, p. 400

In the end, little as they liked the system in place, when Flaubert and Gautier found themselves in the position of the hated father-in-law, they both automatically reverted to the dowry rules. Flaubert forced his undowried orphan niece into a practical marriage with a man of property, rather than to the man she loved:

> *Ernest Commanville, that prosperous young timber merchant, for example.... Commanville would do very nicely for Caroline. He was not merely a decent fellow. He was, in the words of Madame Flaubert, 'an industrialist in a splendid financial position. He has a mechanical sawmill with a steam engine in Dieppe which yields excellent profits'. How could any girl say no to 'a rich man who loves her and take her without a penny'?*
>
> *Caroline hated the whole idea. She wept with rage....the task of persuading the wretched girl now fell to her uncle.*
>
> Geoffrey Wall, *Flaubert,* p. 263.

Note: It is only fitting that Flaubert's practical nephew-in-law almost ruined him. While Commanville may not have been the crook, swindler, blackmailer and pimp described by the Goncourts (pp. 257-9), he was unquestionably an unlucky businessman whose bankruptcy destroyed Flaubert's fortune, since Flaubert needed to save the family name from disgrace.

As for Gautier, in the course of his wild life he acquired two quasi-wives, three children, and the accompanying headaches: his unmarried status cost him dearly in the eye of the public, but it was really just a show of atheist piety. When the sleazeball golddigger Catulle Mendès (who would end up going through more than one dowry) finally appeared on the scene to marry his daughter Judith, Gautier responded just as the most bourgeois father-in-law would have done, and assumed that it was just a dowry raid. For that reason he tried to prevent the wedding, and he never forgave his daughter's mother for encouraging it:

> *[The] Mendès tribe proclaim that I am an idiot and are already claiming my inheritance....*

Joanna Richardson, *Judith Gautier*, p. 47.

Conclusion

Marriage, adultery, prostitution, celibacy, love marriage, arranged marriage, marriage for money, meaningful relationships, free love: all have major flaws. The continental paradise of sexual freedom existed no more than did any of the others. During the nineteenth century, the French looked for paradise in Spain, Italy, and even Turkey. In the twentieth century, Foucault looked for it in Sweden, Turkey again, and finally Berkeley. Emma Bovary, Holden Caulfield, and hip

Americans of my generation looked for it in France. Puritan hellhole or libertine hellhole, take your pick -- your projection of an erotic utopia is as just as real as the lover of your dreams.

Appendix
Sexual Realism

Two prominent figures seem somehow to have escaped the Platonist dowry hell: Victor Hugo and Gustave Courbet. Both chose a kind of realism. In the case of Courbet it was a naive, matter-of-fact realism, politically interpreted. Many of his lovers were also his models, and he seems to have preferred hefty women: his fat nudes outraged the critics.

To my mind a married man is a reactionary.

Gerstle Mack, *Gustave Courbet,* p. 86.

Knowing there are women all over the world, I see no reason to carry one with me.

Courbet, p. 122.

The basis of realism the negation of the ideal, a negation towards which my studies have left me for fifteen years and which no artist has dared to affirm categorically until now.

Courbet, p. 89.

Hugo's realism was more sophisticated. Like Aristotle, rather than setting the ideal against the actual, he understood that the ideal woman was present in every particular instance of womanhood:

> *First, Hugo had nearly always shown a marked preference for what he euphemistically termed "the first woman who comes along". Sex by chance selection was convenient, physically and sociologically interesting, and the anonymity made it easy to grasp the essence in the individual: "Woman is in those women".*
>
> Robb, *Victor Hugo,* p. 484.

Westward the course of empire takes its way

The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed
A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior! .....

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior! ....

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!"
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered, with a sigh,
Excelsior! .....

A traveller, by the faithful hound,
Half-buried in the snow was found,
Still grasping in his hand of ice
That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,
And from the sky, serene and far,
a voice fell, like a falling star,
Excelsior!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I would like to have [first editions of] Mademoiselle Maupin *and* Lélia. *To me these books are very strange; they are analyses of Insatiability, the intellectual malady of our times.*

Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal,* April 24, 1871.

The time will come -- I firmly believe this -- when every young person will not resolve to stick a pistol in his mouth if he can't become a leading light of the century.

George Sand, *Horace.*

The romantics used Idealist and Platonist terminology to express their boundless desire and their endless striving for the impossible and elusive ideal (e.g. *die Blaue Blume* or the Ideal Woman) which, once discovered, will fade and die, because no longer virgin or no longer ideal. Of course, as the product of the liberation of desire following the Declaration of the Rights of Man's dissolution of the estates, this Platonism

was not much like the old Platonism. Anyone could now want anything, but only a few could get it, and with the magic of the market doing its work, the object of desire would keep moving just beyond your grasp -- and anyway, by the time you got it it would normally have already been devalued.

In the United States *die Blaue Blume* was located in the frontier West, and romantic idealism expressed itself by geographical expansion, with the same disillusion whenever the goal was attained. The excitement of pioneering was in dreaming of the ideal homestead, finding it, and breaking the virgin soil; the actual. no-longer-virgin developed farm was boring and disappointing, just as the previous farm had been, and just like as dowried wife always are.

> *My heart filled with bitterness and rebellion, bitterness against the pioneering madness which had scattered our family.... Doesn't this whole migration of the Garlands and the McClintocks seem like madness?...."Father", I bluntly said "you've been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. For fifty years you've always been moving westwards, and always you have gone from certainty to uncertainty, from a comfortable home to a shanty."*
>
> Hamlin Garland, *Son of the Middle Border*

A pseudo-scientific slogan (from a time when Christian providence still informed geology) encouraged dreamy American pioneers to move on to arid, uncultivable lands: "Rain follows the plow". This turned out not to be true, and in his autobiography Hamlin Garland shows how his own father was all but destroyed (and his beloved uncle destroyed) by the failure of their idealizing pursuit of perfect homesteads, always further west -- first in Wisconsin, then in Minnesota, Iowa, and South Dakota, until the son finally convinced the aged romantic not to move on to even worse land in Montana.

Garland especially noted the destructive impact of frontier life on women. Whether in American West or in France, it is always the woman who represents the mundane, the actual, and the imperfect, and she is also always the one who bears the brunt of idealism.

> *Ella to some degree doubted whether the life they were all living was worth while. "We make the best of it", she said "but none of us are living up to our dreams.*
>
> Garland. p. 291

> *Sylvie heaved a sigh. "My friend," she said "one has to accept things; life doesn't always turn out the way you want".*
>
> Gérard de Nerval, in "Sylvie", *Selected Writings,* p. 163

Westward the course of Empire takes its way:

> *The road smokes beneath you, the bridges rumble, everything falls back and is left behind. What is the meaning of this horrific movement? Where are you racing to? Answer! -- There is no answer. Everything on earth flies by, and looking askance, other nations and states step aside to make way.*
>
> Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*

Did 19th century Frenchmen have sex with their wives?

> *An "alliance" between two families was negotiated with as much formality as one by diplomats. If the parties happened to have a real or fancied inclination for one another, this merely added an element of exquisite perfection and agreeable luxury to the arrangement -- an ultimate touch of whimsicality amounting almost to insolence.*
>
> Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World,* p 206.

> *Amongst aristocratic nations birth and fortune frequently make two such different beings of man and woman, that they can never be united to each other. Their passions draw them together, but the condition of society, and the notions suggested by it, prevent them from contracting a permanent and ostensible tie. The necessary consequence is a great number of transient and clandestine connections. Nature secretly avenges herself for the constraint imposed upon her by the laws of man.....*
>
> *The same cause operates, though more indirectly, on married life. Nothing better serves to justify an illicit passion, either to the minds of those who have conceived it or to the world which looks on,*

than compulsory or accidental marriages. ....The very circumstances which render matrimonial fidelity more obligatory also render it more easy. In aristocratic countries the object of marriage is rather to unite property than persons; hence the husband is sometimes at school and the wife at nurse when they are betrothed. It cannot be wondered at if the conjugal tie which holds the fortunes of the pair united allows their hearts to rove; this is the natural result of the nature of the contract.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Book 3, Chapter XI: "That The Equality Of Conditions Contributes To The Maintenance Of Good Morals In America"

My cousin Feodora, talking to me about a branch of her family which is almost poor, said, "Just imagine! they are people who for five generations married for love!"

Goncourts, p. 337.

Did 19th century Frenchmen have sex with their wives? My researches so far have not turned up any evidence that they did. They seem to have preferred house servants, tubercular working girls, prostitutes, courtesans, opera singers, actresses, other men's wives, and 17 year

old virgins. It may be, of course, that the Frenchman of that era occasionally did have sex with their wives, but either were ashamed to admit it, or else just felt that marital sex is not a suitable topic for decent conversation, much less for literature.

Marriages were always about the chunk of money a worthy man is awarded for taking another man's daughter off his hands. Along with the dowry comes the daughter's virginity, and if she has none she loses value and either ends up as a nun, a prostitute, or the wife of a man who is himself unmarketable. To all intents and purposes, the dowry is the marker of passionlessness or the gravestone of desire. Just as the father could not have sex with the daughter whose dowry he was to provide, in the same way the new son-in-law, while not forbidden to have sex with his wife (far from it, it was an unpleasant duty for both of them) he had little real need for his wife once the dowry was acquired, and this feeling was often mutual.

Before the marriage both the prospective son in law and the dowried girl might well have been aching with love and hot to trot, but they almost never were pining for one another, and their dreams normally were of freedom and passion, not of conjugal duties . The dowry divides the world into two parts: love and marriage, escape and bondage, the erotic and the utilitarian, the ideal and the real, and the imaginary and the actual.

The dowry comes with the wife but belongs to the husband, and he often uses it to finance the fun he had wanted to have in the first place, but from the case of Prince Belgiojoso below we can see this arrangement was not symmetrical, and that the dowry-possessing cheating husband would not necessarily grant his wife any more freedom than the dowry-possessing father had.

> *[Prince Belgiojoso] had a different princess every day.... [Émile de Girardin] is every woman's husband except his own wife's.... Comte Gilbert de Voisins, accompanied by a very beautiful woman – as always not his own....*
>
> Houssaye, p. 80, p. 217, p. 263.

> *I was seated between Delacroix and Comte Gilbert de Voisins, who arrived when we were already at the table. His first question was "Who is that schoolmistress next to Morny?" I was not exactly worried that I would upset him by replying "That's your wife". He searched far back in his memory before answering "Well, that is possible".... After dinner Gilbert de Voisins, who was afraid of nothing, not even his wife, had the impertinence of having himself presented to her. She took it well. "It seems to me, monsieur, that I had the honor of being presented to you around 1832".*
>
> Goncourts, p. 287 (1847).

> *The Prince [Belgiojoso, Princess Cristina's husband], who lived like the devil according to the gospel of the dandies of the time, did not allow the Princess to live the same way. If he had found her out in that episode he would have picked up a table knife to slash her face.*
>
> Houssaye, p. 139.

Sex without a dowry was of several two types. The various grades of free-market sexual partners *(femmes galantes, lorettes, grisettes, filles soumises -- libres* or *en carte --* and *filles insoumises*, 18,000 of them in all in Paris) were the easiest and commonest option, but these women had anti-dowries, and with them a man's male vigor, rather than being employed in gaining his family wealth and real estate, was actually squirting away the family nest egg. For this reason, most decent folk chose the second option, which was for the adventurous spouse to leave the other spouse at home to attend to the dowry single-handed while the free spouse engaged in a dowry-neutral affair with a married person of the opposite sex.

So is some sort of violation necessary for sexual excitement? "First love" itself is a kind of violation, when a young couple enters a world of experience previously forbidden to them as children. But how long does that last? Is sex, in and of itself, comparable to mashed potatoes? To a starving man looking through the

glass from outside the restaurant, mashed potatoes look delicious, and he even might find excitement in breaking in and stealing some. But once you're inside the store and can have all the mashed potatoes you want (i.e., once you're married) , you need garnishes and sauces, usually novelty and/or transgression. For the starving man, the first dish of mashed potatoes is really the only one, and all the others are anticlimactic.

Imagine the best porn movie ever made, with hot sex, hot actors, exciting action, the necessary minimum of plot, good lighting and cinematography, etc., etc. Then imagine that the opening scene of the movie was the couple's wedding, and that what you were watching was hot conjugal bliss. Doesn't that take the fun out of it? Theoretically, voyeurism itself could provide the excitement, if you were secretly watching an actual married couple's actual sex life, or perhaps even if you were watching an actor in the movie watching the couple going at it, but generally with a marital porn movie you'd end up thinking "These nice, respectable people are having fun, and I'm not", which is completely boring and even more depressing.

Some say that novelists don't write about sexually happy marriages because there aren't any, but I doubt that. First, no matter how powerful the various forces working against sexually happy marriage are, there have to be exceptions. No social "law" is absolute; thinking that they can be is a 19th century delusion. Furthermore,

novelists do not confine themselves to the typical: they look for dramatic stories which have some kind of edge and which preferably include elements not talked about in polite society. In order to get these stories they are willing to go to the ends of the earth and to dig up the rarest of types -- mentally retarded peasants living on roots in caves, serial killers living in the sewers of Paris, foreign conspirators planning to take over the world, etc.

So novelists could write about happy marriages if they wanted to, even if happy marriages were vanishingly rare. But why would they? There'd be no fun in it: "Happy marriages are all alike". If a married couple has ecstatic sex three times a day for twenty years it's not a story, it's a statistic (to be specific, 21,915). In teal life excessively happy couples are generally regarded as lacking in sophistication and get teased unmercifully, and for this reason they usually moderate or at least conceal their behavior and work to simulate the normal grumpy state.

Addendum: It has just been brought to my attention that the relationship between the painter Ingres and his wife is reported to have been close and affectionate. However, as a painter in the classical style Ingres was an outlier and not properly part of our sample.

The Most Overrated Work of Fiction of All Time

Stephen Crane’s “Maggie, a Girl of the Streets” is on all the American Fiction lists, but I don't see why. Naturalism is often lurid, melodramatic, moralizing crap, but Crane far surpasses the rest of them. This story is 50% The Girl Who Was Ruined, 50% Painted Women Who Wear Skimpy Outfits and Drive Men Mad, 50% temperance tract, 50% anti-immigration pamphlet, 50% anti-Christian satire, and 50% local color (which may or may not be accurate). If you try to fit that much crap into one 60-page story, the consequences will be dire.

Ma Johnson is drunk or passed out every minute of her life and spends her waking time beating her husband, beating her children, breaking furniture and crockery, and pawning anything she hasn’t broken yet. Pa Johnson is drunk all the time too, which must make it rough for him, considering that he still has to go to work every day, besides completely refurnishing the house a couple of times a week too. And these aren’t even the dirty nasty kind of immigrant — by their name they’re Swedes. Crane was horrified by the most innocuous immigrants of all. (Yes, he was the son of a Methodist minister. How’d you guess?)

Maggie dies a month or two after being dumped by her seducer and two pages after she hits the streets, but no details are given. Based on what Crane tells us, she might have died of pure sexual frustration after failing to get any clients.

Note

> It has been argued that "Maggie: Girl of the Streets" is not very highly rated, and therefore cannot be seriously overrated. But I have often seen this book on many syllabuses and lists, always in the company of good books, and none of these lists has warned the reader about how crappy the story really is.

Melville’s Confidence Man

"Well, then", continues the confidence man,"just lend me your watch till to-morrow."

New Orleans Picayune, June 21, 1849

A steamboat starts from St. Louis headed down the Mississippi heading toward New Orleans, with passengers getting on and off at every stop. This area was still on the frontier, but Melville, unlike Mark Twain writing about the same time and place, doesn't give you much local color. Instead you overhear a series of dialogues between strangers (or "brother strangers", since we're all strangers) on the subjects of confidence, credit, trust, faith, charity, conviviality, geniality, friendship, and so on. From the beginning we have reason to suspect that several of these mostly-nameless speakers are actually one man in various disguises -- the title character, who sets up the chumps with spiritual preaching about "confidence" and "trust". (The English term "confidence man" came from the American frontier, and there are very few recorded uses of the term earlier than Melville's).

Nothing improbable happens in the book, but Melville admits that the book still isn't realistic. What's unrealistic is his way of telling the story, which breaks several rules of fiction and is deliberately hard to follow. Few of the characters have names, and even these names are seldom used. Giving a name to the con man (or men?) with his (their?) many disguises would reduce the confusion, and anyway, as Melville says, everyone else is playing roles too, and none of their names are real.

Every optimistic cliché you have ever heard is found in the first part of the book. Self-help writers, investment counselors, management consultants, prosperity theologians, futurologists, free-market visionaries – in the America of a century and a half ago, all of them were all already there. If you trust, you will be rich beyond your wildest dreams; but the doubters will be left behind:

> *"Not a player but shall win". "Missions I would quicken with the Wall Street spirit....In brief, the conversion of the heathen would be let out on contract."*

In the second half of the book, however, multiple transformations of the themes of solitude and togetherness, trust and fraud, autonomy and conviviality, and misanthropy and philanthropy are developed in a dazzling series of dialogues which lead to no certain

conclusion. (Hawthorne on Melville: "He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief". In this book you are often reminded of how powerful Christian belief was in 19th century America -- often highly unorthodox belief.)

The “philanthropists” here seem mostly to be either con men or else their suckers, but while the misanthropes initially seem to be either more perceptive or more honest than the philanthropists, they often cave in to the conman's entreaties in the end. Seemingly this is from sheer loneliness – trust and charity make you easier to cheat, but also (like wine) make life bearable In Plato the Social Lie is a necessary evil but ultimately a good thing, but Melville's message is more ambiguous.

Chapters 37-40 take a dig at Emersonian self-reliance. Melville was often dependent on financial help from others, and Emerson’s uncharitable principles seemed unduly harsh to him. In chapter 39 Charlie, the Emersonian, refuses on high moral principles either to lend or to give money to his needy friend Frank -- for friendship is something too high and pure to be smirched either by a business transaction or charitable giving. Melville mentions Rabelais in one place, and many of the Emersonian anti-philanthropic speeches in the book are versions of the sponger Panurge's praise of debt, debtors, and bankrupts in Book III of Gargantua and Pantagruel:

Imagine the idea and form of some world..... in which there is not one debtor or creditor: a world without debts.... Among the stars, there would be no regular course whatsoever. All will be in disarray....Among the elements there will be no sympathizing, alternation, or transmutation whatever, for the one will not repute himself obliged to the other; he hadn't lent him anything....This nothing-lending world would be nothing but bitchery, a more unearthly wrangle than the election of the University Rector of Paris..... On the contrary, imagine a different world in which everyone lends, everyone owes, all are debtors, all are lenders. O what harmony there would be among the regular movements of the heavens. I think I hear it as well as Plato ever did. What sympathy among the elements..... Among humans peace, love, fondness, fidelity, repose, banquets, feasts, joy, blitheness, gold, silver, small change, chains, rings, merchandise will trot about from hand to hand. No lawsuit, no war, no dispute; no one will be a userer, no one a sneak, no one stingy, no one a refuser."

Rabelais, tr. Frame, pp. 269-271.

Melville gives his blessed gift for the sardonic free rein throughout and agrees with me (and with Wittgenstein) on the following important point:

> *Even in the least virtuous product of the human mind, if there can be found but nine good jokes, some philosophers are clement enough to affirm that these nine good jokes should redeem all the wicked thoughts, though plenty as the population of Sodom*

In the first part of *The Confidence Man* Melville portrays the optimistic American cheesiness as well as anyone ever has. As the book progresses, it raises larger and larger issues, without ever resolving them, thus becoming a classic.

To the Shores of Tripoli

Michael Paul Rogin
Subversive Genealogy

The Barbary Pirates, the American tradition of secular government, an American suicide bomber attacking Muslims, Billy Budd, and a reversible pro/anti-war song.

The more closely you look at something, the more interesting it becomes. For the hedgehogs among us, this can be a problem -- when you're trying to fit the petty details into the one big thing, you want the details to be controllable. But for us foxes sniffing around, the farther the details take you, the more fun it is.

The Shores of Tripoli

America was a trading nation from the beginning, and during the first two decades of its existence the Barbary states of the Maghreb (the SW shore of the Mediterranean) preyed on American shipping, which since the Revolution had been unprotected by the British navy. In 1785 two American ships were captured, and the majority of crewmen eventually died in captivity. For about twenty years the still-weak US used a combination of tribute, ransom, and diplomacy to deal with the pirates, but Thomas Jefferson had always been unhappy with this approach, and when he became President he chose war.

Piracy of this robber-baron type is characteristic of times and places without an overarching political order. The Barbary States thought themselves to be charging a fee ("protection rent") for the service of protection from piracy -- even though they themselves were among the pirates. During the struggles between the great European empires in the early modern period, piracy was rampant, and the imperial nations freely used pirates (rebaptized "privateers") against one another. The long struggles for control of the Mediterranean and Black seas between Venice and Genoa, and later between the Ottomans and Spanish, are similar cases.

In the late eighteenth century the long war between the French and the British enabled the pirates to practice their trade, and the losers were the smaller states. At one point the US was working with Portugal, Naples, the two Sicilies, Venice, Malta, Denmark and Sweden to settle the problem, but they found the British and French to be dragging their feet. (After the defeat of the French in 1815, the Maghreb was fairly quickly pacified.)

In 1801 the US refused to pay increased tribute to the small state of Tripoli (in the west of present-day Libya), and Tripoli declared war. (This is the Tripoli of the Marine Hymn -- the "Halls of Montezuma", properly Moctezuma, represent Mexico City). The US sent a fleet which might have gained a fairly easy victory if one of its ships, the USS Philadelphia, had not run aground in 1803, leaving its crew in Tripolitan hands. It took a number of

bold American moves to bring the war to a relatively successful conclusion which ended the tribute payments, and even so it was necessary to ransom the crew.

Reuben James
and the three USS Reuben Jameses

Reuben (sometimes Ruben) James was one of the first American heroes of the Tripoli campaign. When the USS Philadelphia was captured, the American commander realized that it would be dangerous to leave it in enemy hands, so Lt. Stephen Decatur and 70 volunteers were sent (in a captured Tripolitan ship renamed the Intrepid) on a bold raid to destroy the Philadelphia. This raid was successful, and when British Admiral Lord Nelson heard of the raid, he called it "the most bold and daring act of the age." In this fight Reuben James made his name by saving Decatur from one of the pirates, and he went on to long career in the US Navy.

The first Reuben James, built in 1919, was sunk on October 31, 1941 while escorting a convoy off Newfoundland -- the first American ship sunk in WWII, even though the US officially had not entered the war. This was the ship about which the song was written. A second Reuben James was launched in 1942 and served through the war, being decommissioned in 1947. The third Reuben James was launched in 1985 and figures in Tom Clancy's *Hunt for Red October.*

Lt. Somers and the USS Somers

Lieutenant Richard Somers was the inadvertent suicide bomber. After the Philadelphia had been destroyed, a plan was hatched to refit the Intrepid as a floating bomb. The plan was to sail the bomb into the Tripoli harbor and abandon it before it exploded, but it exploded prematurely:

In September, 1804, Lieutenant Somers was given charge of the Intrepid, a bomb ketch that had been filled with explosives and was to be sailed into the harbor at Tripoli and, planning to abandon the ship to explode in the center of the enemy fleet. Unfortunately, the Intrepid exploded before she could reach her intended position, killing Somers and his entire crew.

In 1842 the navy launched a 259-ton brig named after Lt. Somers; this was the ship on which the mutiny assumed to have inspired Billy Budd took place. There have also been three more Intrepids, most recently a WWII aircraft carrier.

The first USS Somers, Herman Melville's cousin, and Billy Budd

In late 1842 the USS Somers left New York for the west coast of Africa. The ship's nominal mission was not an important one -- it was primarily being used as a training ship, and was crewed mostly by young novices.

There were only two commissioned officers on board, the junior of whom was Herman Melville's older cousin, the 30-year-old Lieutenant Guert Gansevoort.

After about two months at sea, when returning to the US by way of the West Indies, the officers of the Somers were told that a mutiny was being plotted. Its leader, the 22-year-old Philip Spencer, was the ne'er-do-well son of the Secretary of War, John Spencer, who had been put on the ship after a series of escapades that had gotten him kicked out of college and nearly expelled from the Navy. According to the report, Spencer's plan was to take over the ship, get rid of the officers, and embark on a career of piracy in the unstable West Indies.

Spencer and two other accused leaders of the conspiracy were hanged after a summary trial which may not have met the requirements of naval law, with Gansevoort serving as one of the judges. This incident roused a controversy when the ship returned to port; those of the accused who had not been hanged were ultimately released, while the officers who presided at the court martial were exonerated after a trial, going on to distinguished military careers.

It is often suggested that the Somers incident was a prototype for Melville's *Billy Budd*. One source asserts without evidence that Gansevoort, despite serving on the court which hanged the alleged conspirators, believed that they were innocent. Other sources claim that the incident harmed Gansevoort's career and reputation -- though his

career was quite successful and he ended up with a ship named after him. Quite understandably, Gansevoort never spoke publicly about the mutiny.

The pro-/anti-war song "Reuben James"

The song "Reuben James" by Woody Guthrie (and others) became popular around 1960, but it had actually been written almost twenty years earlier, shortly after the sinking of the ship by a German U-boat. and the 1960 version has a more ambiguous conclusion than the WWII version did:

> *Many years have passed and still I wonder why the worst of men must fight and the best of men must die.*

During the Stalin-Hitler Pact "The Reuben James" had been an isolationist anti-war song on the 1941 anti-war album "Songs for John Doe", which was never released. During the rest of WWII the song next was a patriotic pro-war song, but then during the sixties it was anti-war again.

The secular Treaty of Tripoli

Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli (unanimously approved by the Senate on June 10, 1797, at the end of one stage of the conflict) read:

> *As the government of the United States of America is not founded in any sense on the Christian religion—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of*

Musselmen [Muslims]—and as the said states have never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

This is a strong expression of secularism, and has been heavily used in recent political arguments. From the point of view of "original intent", the unanimous ratification of this treaty a little more than a decade after the ratification of the constitution would seem to be strong evidence that the U.S. was not founded as a Christian nation. On the other hand, a treaty is not part of the constitution, and this particular peace treaty was not a success -- the Tripolitans relapsed into slaving and piracy, and we had to go to war against them more than once in the succeeding years.

Sources*: http.idiocentrism.com/barbary.htm*

The Alcoholic Republic

W. J. Rorabaugh

The United States was founded on drunkenness, but around 1830 the country sobered up, got religion, forgot about drunken republican brotherhood, and devoted itself to property accumulation.

During the early colonial period spirits were regarded as a healthful gift of God and drinking started at breakfast. During the the revolutionary and early republican periods communal binge drinking became widespread, but after about 1830 or so, when republican ideals had proven hard to maintain, the norm became individualistic evangelical Christianity, sobriety, self-improvement in the pursuit of wealth – and solo binge drinking. Still later, when a permanent propertyless working class with almost no hope of rising any higher came into being, desperate forms of escapist drinking became most prevalent.

For the first settlers west of the Appalachians, whiskey was the only cash crop and served as a form of currency in a cash-poor region. (Rorabaugh compares American frontier life in the early 19th century to that of the similar impoverished rural cultures in developing but still underdeveloped Sweden and Scotland). Many of the American groups especially noted for drunkenness are about what you'd expect (laborers, sailors, Irish

immigrants), but few would have guessed that schoolteachers and ministers would be among them, and it's also surprising to find that the Primitive (Hardshell) Baptists forbade members to join temperance societies and often were moonshiners.

The temperance movement rose as early as 1750, but only when it took a religious form around 1830 did it become effective. Drinking by immigrants and the lower classes was always regarded as more harmful than drinking by "real Americans", and the prohibition movement always tended to be middle class and nativist.

The beverages of choice were at first fruit brandy, rum and hard cider, then whiskey and cider during the early period of independence, and finally whiskey and beer. After the Revolution tea and wine were generally regarded as unpatriotic, and after a certain point, so was rum. During the early days milk and water were hard to get and were even regarded as unhealthful, which they often were., and few adults drank either if they could help it. The American taste was for distilled spirits mixed strong, and some early temperance advocates even promoted beer as a temperance drink. (But beer only became really important relatively late, with the German immigration after 1850.)

Rorabaugh speculates that whiskey helped people endure a horrendous diet consisting almost entirely of pork and corn meal. Beyond that, "Americans had psychological needs that were met better by alcohol than

by food”. American drinking culture, as distinguished from Italian drinking culture for example, helped men deal with their disappointments, anxiety, and high but probably unattainable goals. He also notes that both abstinence and the characteristic alternation of abstinence and bingeing are conducive to a strong work ethic, contrasting both patterns to the use of opium in that respect.

There's a lesson here, of course. Utah, Mississippi, Saudi Arabia, and the other abstinent lands are hellholes of poverty and fanaticism, whereas the nations which brought progress, prosperity, and freedom into the world were all drunken.

The Muskogee - Waukesha - Bismarck Triangle

In the Chicago area in the early thirties, Lester William Polfus (or Polsfuss), of Waukesha, Wisconsin (a.k.a. "Les Paul", a.k.a "Rhubarb Red") made a good living as a country musician, but he played jazz and blues on the side, and when he got to New York he mostly played jazz (including early bebop at Minton's) or a jazzy kind of pop. By 1938 he was a regular on one of the top national radio shows. In his own words:

> *The year was 1938. I was living in New York and playing on the NBC radio network., five nights a week. It was a coast-to-coast broadcast of The Chesterfield Hour with Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians, featuring the Les Paul Trio.....*
>
> *One day my bass player Ernie Newton says to me: "We've been working hard, knocking our brains out. Let's go to Chicago. Let's go out to Wisconsin, see your mom, take a couple of weeks off."*
>
> *So we went up there to Waukesha. And to my surprise, my mother is not too enthused that I'm featured on the biggest radio program in the United States. I thought she'd be beaming with pride! But she says "You know, Lester, that show is too classy". She was always a lover of country and*

bluegrass-- that's why I started off as Rhubarb Red, influenced by my mother's love of that type of music.

"You stick around" she days. "I'll make you some chili, and I'll dial this radio station. I want you to hear this music.

So she tunes in KVOO in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and I hear Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. "They got drums and everything in there," my mother says to me. That's where you should go"....

Pretty soon we were jamming [with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys], having a helluva good time, when I notice this young black fellow standing down below me and looking up at me.
We took a break, and this guy says to me, "Mr. Paul, can I get your autograph?" So I give him my autograph. "I play the guitar", he tells me.
I say, "Well, are ya any good?" He says, "Yes sir."

I ask him his name. He says, "Charlie. Charlie Christian". I handed him the guitar and he played a little. I says, "Jesus, you are good...."

Les Paul, notes to *Charlie Christian: Genius of the Electric Guitar* (Sony-Columbia-Legacy)

Les Paul was a self-taught engineer who designed and modified his own electric guitars (though not the commercial "Les Paul") and who also put together the first 8-track recording studio. He gave Christian a guitar in New York, where Christian quickly got a job with Benny Goodman and joined Thelonious Monk and the others to lay the foundations for bebop.

Variations of this story took place in Muskogee, Oklahoma, where Christian met and encouraged the teenage Barney Kessel (probably in 1940), and in Bismarck, North Dakota, where Christian inspired the teenage Mary Osborne (probably before 1939). By 1945 all four of these guitarists had made the big time in New York or L.A., and by then T-Bone Walker, who had known Christian in Oklahoma, was pioneering a jazzy kind of electric blues in Chicago and L.A.

Now, the point is that these five guitarists all came from the middle of nowhere: Waukesha (WS), Oklahoma City (OK), Muskogee (OK), Minot (ND), and the environs of Dallas (TX), which was not at that time the major city it has become. They were all at least as Western as Southern (as Ralph Ellison has argued), and their musical environment was countryish. All of them had careers in the boonies before they reached the big city, and all of them were at the top of their trade by the time they reached New York. New York was marketing a music tradition which had matured elsewhere.

This tradition included elements of pop, jazz, blues, and country-western (with the emphasis on the "western"), and it would develop into be-bop, but it wasn't "eclectic" -- it just hadn't been disambiguated yet. Les Paul ended up as a countryish pop singer, Christian and Osborne as proto-bop jazz musicians, Barney Kessel as a studio musician and one of the founders of lounge jazz, and T-Bone Walker as a jazzy electric bluesman, but they could all do all that stuff.

Maybe this has something to do with the Louisiana Purchase, with New Orleans the hub of a Mississippi River musical universe. Or maybe it's a relic of the frontier and the Old West -- Oklahoma had been Indian Territory until 1907, and among other places Christian played in Deadwood, which was still a rough town. It's an understatement to say that this part of the US is no longer regarded as a hotbed of musical creativity, but during the first half of the nineteenth century big-time jazz men came from all over the area -- Muskogee, Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis (Lester Young) and even Davenport, Iowa (Bix Beiderbecke).

But New York was where the money was, and New York's catchment was ultimately the whole world. In New York the North Dakotans met a few actual New Yorkers (e.g., Bud Powell and Thelonius Monk) but mostly they met other immigrants. Benny Goodman originally came from Chicago, but his parents had originally had come from Hungary, and in 1940 Goodman in fact did

commission clarinet pieces by the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok. (It is unfortunate that Bartok, now a refugee in Manhattan, was too sick to drop by Minton's, though his music did have an influence on jazz musicians).

The musical world in which Bismarck, N.D. was able to support two cutting-edge musicians was fragile and transient. The radio and the phonograph was bringing sophisticated music everywhere, but they were not yet powerfule enough to entirely replace live music. Eventually, though, the best musicians ended up in New York and returned home only on tours, and as time went on the recorded-music biz matured to the point that it ended up replacing the real thing. Styles changed, too. For example, when I was growing up, Benny Goodman was my parents' music and I couldn't listen to it, and I never would have listened to Barney Kessel's pre-Elvis lounge jazz either. Elvis blew a lot of better musicians out of the water: in the words of the T-Bone Walker bio, "Rock's rise had made Walker's classy style an anachronism".

Appendix I:

The techies

The techies of the electric guitar were Westerners too. The Dopyera brothers, Slovak immigrants who invented the non-electric but amplified Dobro, worked out of LA. Adolph Rickenbacker, a Swiss immigrant, developed the first electric guitar in Santa Ana (CA), and Leo Fender developed his in Fullerton (CA). The early

electric guitars tended to be associated with country music, and many of the early amplified instruments were steel guitars (first developed even further west, in Hawaii).

Appendix II: Jazz in Muskogee

This study determines why the relatively small town of Muskogee, Oklahoma produced more jazz musicians per capita than any other town of its size in the United States in the 20th century. It examines the years 1795 to 1945, from the time of European settlement through World War II. An account of the cultural history of Muskogee germane to the development of jazz and the critical history and contemporary perspective of the eight musicians are accompanied by unpublished oral histories with five of the musicians: Aaron Bell, Barney Kessel, Clarence Love, Jay McShann, and Claude Williams. Don Byas, and Joe and Walter "Foots" Thomas are also discussed in the study.

Hugh William Foley Jr., *Jazz from Muskogee, Oklahoma: Eastern Oklahoma as a hearth of musical culture*, PhD Dissertation *Oklahoma State University.*

http://phdtree.org/pdf/ 25317781-jazz-from-muskogee-oklahoma-eastern-oklahoma-as-a-hearth-of-musical-culture/

Classic Truisms
About Academia

Ignorance turned out to be a major result of specialization. Decision makers give up their knowledge of the whole as they seek full and complete knowledge of their particular piece of the whole. But ignorance is not only a correlative of specialization. It is almost a condition for peaceful coexistence among specialists.

Ignorance tends to be meaningfully distributed throughout the hierarchies. There was more ignorance at the center than at the periphery.....This brings our particular concern into focus. Ignorance at the scale that we observed could not have occurred by chance alone. Ignorance at this scale involving scientists -- that is, men dedicated to knowledge above all else -- had to be deliberate.

Poliscide, Theodore Lowi et. al.,
Macmillan, 1976, p. 282

People would argue about the multiplication table if there were enough money in it.

Leibniz (apocryphal)

What can be seen here so visibly is a historically well-determined little pedagogy. A pedagogy that teaches the pupil that there is nothing outside the text....A pedagogy that gives to the master's voice the limitless sovereignty that allows it to restate the text indefinitely.

Michel Foucault, *Essential Works*, vol. 2, p. 416; originally in "My Body, This Paper, This Fire"

First you tell people what you're going to say, and then you tell them what you're not going to say, and then you say it, and then you tell people what you didn't say, and then you tell people what you said.

Harry Stack Sullivan
(caricaturing the academic paper)

At the end of my life I came to realize that during my whole academic career I had been writing as though my reader were a paranoid idiot.

Harry Stack Sullivan again

Veblen had a concept of "trained incapacity" which seems especially relevant to the question of right and wrong orientation. By trained

incapacity he meant a state of affairs where one's very abilities can function as blindnesses.

> Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change,* p. 7; Thorstein Veblen *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts,* p. 347.

Again, we have such notions as John Dewey's concept of 'occupational psychosis', his thesis that a society's patterns of thought are shaped by the patterns of livelihood, that 'spiritual' values get their authority because they reinforce the ways of thinking and feeling by which man equips himself to accomplish the tasks indigenous to his environment."

> Kenneth Burke, "The Nature of Art Under Capitalism", p. 315 in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*; see also "Occupational Psychosis" in *Permanence and Change.* The source in Dewey remains unknown, to me at least.

A contribution to the history of doggerel

Michael Hamburger:

To Einstein as to Plato,
Time was a hot potato.

Monty Python's "Bruce" sketch:

Aristotle, Aristotle was a bugger for the bottle .....

John Crowe Ransom:

In all the good Greek of Plato
I lack my roast beef and potato.
A better man was Aristotle,
Pulling steady on the bottle.

Owen Wister (1888-1938):

Said Aristotle unto Plato,
"Have another sweet potato?
"Said Plato unto Aristotle,
"Thank you, I prefer the bottle."

Gilbert and Sullivan (Patience, 1881):

Then a sentimental passion
of a vegetable fashion
must excite your languid spleen,

An attachment a la Plato
for a bashful young potato,
or a not too French French bean!

Lord Byron, *Don Juan,* Canto I, #204:

I'll call the work "Longinus o'er a Bottle,
Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle."....

Canto VII, #4

By Swift, by Machiavel, by Rochefoucault,
By Fénélon, by Luther, and by Plato;
By Tillotson, and Wesley, and Rousseau,
Who knew this life was not worth a
potato.....

Note

They say that in Cockney rhyming slang "Aristotle" means "arse: "ass" --> "glass" --> "bottle" --> "Aristotle", then shortened to "aris", which is close enough to "arse" to make this whole story seem a little fishy.

Deadly Ernest

As we know, Europe during the 19th century was infested with a toxic seriousness from which there could have been no peaceful escape. Bourgeois ambition, bourgeois respectability, respect for law, rigid notions of chastity and purity, exquisite refinements of class distinctions and the cruelties of class, devout adherence to ideals (religious, secular, and erotic), love of country, an ethic of self-sacrifice, a booming but ruthlessly competitive economy, sound fiscal policies, miraculous new technology, and efficient public administration ultimately led to several bloody and pointless (but well-organized and efficient) wars, and in 1914 we entered the world of blood and iron.

The name *Ernst / Ernest* can be taken as a marker of this horrible seriousness. This name, which is derived from the Old High German *eornest* ("grimly serious, sworn to fight to the death") spread from Germany to England along with the Hanoverian dynasty (Georges I-II-III-IV) and I think that it is fair to conclude that the seriousness did too; with due reservations this can be called The German Seriousness.

Earnest, it turns out, is an entirely different English word derived from Anglo-Saxon, French,

Latin, Greek, and ultimately Semitic words meaning"pledge", as in "earnest money", but in British usage this word merged with "Ernest". And 19th and 20th-century earnestness indeed could mean bloodthirsty military *eornest*-ness: "*Into the valley of death rode the six hundred.*"

French and British decadents and bohemians fought The German Seriousness as best they could, but there was no hope. Despite heroic offensives like Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest* and Samuel Butler's satirical *The Way of All Flesh* (whose the main character is a dreadfully serious preacher's son named Ernest), the cause of unseriousness was doomed from the start. In 1871 seriousness definitively gained the day in France when ten or twenty thousand frivolous Communards were murdered, and in 1895 Wilde was sent to jail — a blow from which he never recovered. (One of the late victims of this plague was Ernest Hemingway, who blew his head off in 1960).

For obvious reasons the name Ernst disappeared from American life after 1917 or so, and Ernest and Earnest have been declining since the 50s and probably will fall out of the top thousand soon enough. How much we will gain from this is uncertain; the "life's a joke" approach to the world characteristic of our present wise leaders appears to be only marginally less horrible.

Bunbury in the Caucasus

1.

And there had been the unfortunate case of a would-be poet who visited him, and was invited to recite his verses, while Lermontov ate half his hamper of freshly salted cucumbers — always a treat — and then scampered away in mid-recitation with the other half stuffed in his pockets.

Lawrence Kelly, *Lermontov: Tragedy in the Caucasus,* 1983, pp. 73-4.

2.

[Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.]

Algernon: Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta.

[Takes one and eats it.]

Jack: Well, you have been eating them all the time.

Algernon. *That is quite a different matter. She is* ***my*** *aunt.*

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest,* Act I Scene 2.

Samuel Butler on Rat-traps and *Eros*

On Rat-traps

Dunkett found that all of his traps failed one after another, and was in such despair at the way the corn got eaten that he resolved to invent a rat-trap. He began by putting himself as nearly as possible in the rat's place.

'*Is there anything', he asked himself, 'in which, if I were a rat, I would have such complete confidence that I could not suspect it without suspecting everything in the world and being unable henceforth to move fearlessly in any direction?'*

He pondered for awhile and had no answer, till one night the room seemed to become full of light, and he heard a voice from Heaven saying 'Drain-pipes'. Then he saw his way. To suspect a common drain-pipe would be to cease to be a rat.

Samuel Butler, *Notebooks*.

Samuel Butler explains relationships

As soon as Jove sees Juno, armed as she for the moment was with all the attractions of Venus, he falls desperately in love with her, and says that she is the only goddess he ever really loved. True there had been the wife of Ixion, and Danae, and Europa and Semele, and Alcmena, and Latona, not to mention herself in days gone by, but he had never loved any of them as he now loved her, in spite of his having been married to her for so many years. What then does she want?

Samuel Butler, *Selected Essays*

Samuel Butler on Wordsworth's "*Lucy*"

If Lucy was the kind of person portrayed in the poem; if Wordsworth murdered her, either by cutting her throat or smothering her, in concert, perhaps, with his friends Southey and Coleridge; and if he had thus found himself released from an engagement which had become irksome to him, or possibly from the threat of an action for breach of contract, there is not a syllable in the poem with which he crowns his crime which is not alive with meaning. On any other supposition, to the general reader it is unintelligible.

Samuel Butler, Selected Essays

Where Philosophy and Sex Both Went Wrong

Plato, tr. Hackforth, Phaedrus, Library of Liberal Arts, 1952.

Plato, tr. Hamilton, The Symposium, Penguin, 1951.

According to Plato philosophy is *eros,* but it is an entirely non-carnal *eros* which is not a desire for any physical consummation, but instead the desire for the knowledge of abstract, invisible Ideal Forms. It was upon this *lucus a non lucendo* that Western philosophy was founded. Plato's description of the carnal *eros* from which philosophy developed in stages hardly prettifies it — *eros,* after all, is not itself beautiful, but is the desire or need for a Beauty which is absent. The obsessed lover is driven almost mad with desire, and must misperceive the beloved as a god:

> [The lover] *beholds a godlike face or bodily form that truly expresses beauty, first there comes to him a shuddering and a measure of that awe which the vision inspired, first there comes on him reverence as at the sight of a god ....with the passing of the shudder, a strange sweating and fever seizes him; by reason of the stream of beauty entering through his eyes comes a*

warmth.... [he] *throbs with ferment in every part....* (*Phaedrus* pp. 96-7).

Lovers are broken and desperate, driven helplessly by their lack:

Each of this is thus the broken tally of a man.... and each of us is perpetually in search of his corresponding tally (*Symposium* p. 62).

A lover's perception of the beloved is a delusional, grotesquely exaggerated self-projection of self which destroys self-control and causes the lover to remove himself from human society:

And so each selects a fair one for his love after his disposition, and even as if the beloved were himself a god he fashions for himself as it were an image, and adorns it to be the object of his veneration and worship (*Phaedrus* p. 99).

He perceives that all his friends and kinsmen have nothing to offer in comparison with this friend in whom there dwells a god.... the "flood of passion" pours in upon the lover; and part of it is absorbed within him, but when he can contain no more the rest flows away outside him.... so he loves, but knows not what he loves: he does not understand, he cannot tell what has

come upon him; like one that has caught a disease of the eye from another, he cannot account for it, not realizing that his lover is, as it were, a mirror in which he beholds himself (*Phaedrus* p. *105).*

Carnal *eros* is personified as a brutish and untamed horse in rut who fights both against both the placid gelding he is harnessed with, and against his master. The carnal horse...

....is crooked of frame, a massive jumble of a creature, with thick short neck, snub nose, black skin, and grey eyes; hot-blooded, consorting with wantonness and vainglory, shaggy of ear, deaf, and hard to control with whip and goad.... (*Phaedrus* p. 103).

In the face of temptation....

....the obedient steed, restrained now as always by modesty, refrains from jumping the beloved; but his fellow, heeding no more the lover's whip, leaps and dashes on sorely troubling his companion and the driver , forcing them to approach the loved one and remind him of the delights of love's commerce. For awhile they struggle, indignant that he [the bad horse] *should force them to a monstrous and forbidden act; but at last. finding no end to their evil plight, they*

> *yield and agree to do his bidding. And so he draws them on, and now they are quite close and behold the spectacle of the beloved flashing upon them* (*Phaedrus* p. 104).

Nonetheless, it is upon desire that philosophy is modeled:

> *When a man, starting from this sensible world and making his way upward by right use of his feeling of love for young men, begins to catch sight of that beauty, he is very near his goal* [i.e., philosophy and wisdom]. *This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim....* (*Symposium* p. 94).

But only desire for young men: the wise man does not "*go after the fashion of a four-footed beast*" and desire or have sex with females. Nor does he have sex with young men, though he desires them. He puts himself in the company of beautiful young men, in the place where temptation is at its highest, but he does not succumb; he wrestles the short-necked, snub-nosed, hotblooded bad horse to his knees and forces him to submit.

The beauty of young men is is not illusory, according to Plato; it is the visible sign (or "lustre") of

invisible virtues of Justice, Temperance, etc., etc. These virtues are what the philosophical lover loves, rather than the young man's beauty itself:

> *Now in the earthly likenesses of justice and temperance and all other prized possessions there dwells no lustre; nay, so dull are the organs wherewith men approach their images that hardly can a few behold that which is imaged; but with beauty it is otherwise.* (*Phaedrus* p. *93).*

Rather than having sex and making babies, however, the lover and the beloved now become parents of Truths:

> *The partnership between them will be far closer and the bond of affection far closer than between ordinary parents, because the children that they share surpass human children by being immortal as well as more beautiful. Everyone would prefer children such as these to children of the flesh* (*Symposium* p. 91).

The problem here is that according to Plato, *eros* is not itself beautiful; it is the desire for beauty and implies a lack of beauty.

> *To judge by what you said, you identified Love as the beloved object instead of with what feels love; that is why you thought that Love is supremely beautiful* (*Symposium* p. 83).

In the same way, then, philosophy -- love of truth -- is not true; it is the needy and delusory desire for a truth which it does not have, and whatever “truth” you find will just be a desperate projection of self, an imagined Other supplementing your lacks, a deceiving appearance which caters to your weaknesses and cravings.

By now, the horses of philosophy have been out of the barn for two and a half millennia already and we’re not going to get them back inside, but you have to ask yourself whether modeling the pursuit of truth on an abnormal mental state resulting from a hormonal imbalance ever was a good idea. Are truth-seekers indeed needy, obsessive, broken human units whose beloved truths are just distorted, fetishized projections of their own neediness and lack? If so, should we really trust them?

According to Plato, if it were not for the Ideal Forms of Truth, Beauty, Being, Justice, etc., we could not know anything at all; but to the extent that our understanding of these Ideal Forms is comparable to the obsessed lover’s self-projection onto his love

object, it seems that these Ideal Forms *must* be grossly distorted misperceptions, and that in consequence we *cannot* in fact know anything at all. Socrates' primary human love object, after all, was the intemperate, impetuous, traitorous Alcibiades, a man who did Athens as much harm as any foreign enemy ever did, and if Socrates' carnal *eros* led him to Alcibiades, how much trust should we place in his philosophical *eros*?

A teacher teaches the students he has, not the students he wishes he had. As Leo Strauss pointed out, it, is possible that Plato's philosophy took the specific form it did because Socrates and Plato lived in a society dominated by oversexed, violent, power-hungry males, and that he expediently expressed his ideas with the help of metaphors that they would understand. If this is so, one can imagine that if he had been dealing with, e.g., farmers, he would have spoken of timely rains and sudden storms, fertilizers and pests, droughts and blights, spades and hoes, granaries and root cellars, and so on; or if he had been dealing with businessmen, he would have spoken of credit and bankruptcy, transport costs and tariffs, interest rates and inflation, bargains and windfalls, etc. — and so on through carpentry, weaving, navigation, dentistry, sausage-making, embalming, and the various other trades.

Would we not be in a better place now if one of these had been chosen for a model instead?

Appendix I:
Plato's sexology

> *I could not love thee, dear, so much,*
> *Loved I not honor more.*
>
> *To Lucasta, Going to the Wars*
> Richard Lovelace

The Platonic understanding of *eros* has something to displease almost everyone but Allan Bloom. Conservatives would react to Socrates' firm disapproval of heterosexuality by calling him a hater, a bigot, and a pervert, while his mention of "monstrous and forbidden acts" and his snark about sissies would not go over well with liberals:

> *We shall find* [the man enslaved to pleasure] *pursuing a weakling rather than a sturdy boy, one who has had a cozy, sheltered upbringing instead of being exposed to the open air, who has given himself up to a soft unmanly life instead of the toil and sweat of manly exercise, who for lack of natural charm tricks himself out with artificial cosmetics, and resorts to other similar practices which are too numerous to need further enumeration; yet before leaving the topic we may sum it up in a sentence: the boy will be of that physical type which in wartime, and other times*

> *that try a man's mettle, inspires confidence in his enemies and alarm in his friends* (*Phaedrus* p. 44).

Socrates' sexology is in fact thoroughly militaristic, but few of today's militarists would accept his suggestion that military morale would be at its highest if the army were composed entirely of male couples (as the Theban Sacred Band indeed was):

> *If then one could contrive that an army or state should consist entirely of lovers and loved it, would impossible for it to have a better organization than that which it would then enjoy through their mutual avoidance of all dishonor and their mutual emulation* (*Symposium* p. 43).

Both in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium* Socrates is described as a dude magnet, albeit a chaste one, and the *Symposium* (p. 98) additionally describes him as a master of the chugalug, which of course made him a major figure in the Athenian fratboy world. All through his flirtation with Phaedrus Socrates takes the high road and entirely rejects the carnal expression of *eros* (though of course it's possible that he's just setting him up or playing hard to get). However, he does include a "devil made me do it" / "whoops I did it again" escape valve for those who slip, offering them a sort of silver medal for at least trying:

> *But if they turn to a way of life more ignoble and unphilosophic, yet covetous of honor, then mayhap in a careless hour, or when the wine is flowing, the wanton horses in the two soul shall catch them off their guard, bring the pair together, and choosing that part which the multitude accounts blissful, achieve their full desire. And this once done, they continue therein, albeit but rarely.... Such a pair are dear friends, but not so dear as that other* [philosophical] *pair…* (*Phaedrus* p. 106)

Plato's sexology has it all: homosociality, homophobia, sex guilt, celibacy, excuses, and sexual obsession. Renaissance Neoplatonists picked up Plato's belief that a physical beauty is the mark of a beautiful soul, but they adapted it to heterosexuality (Villon thought that Alcibiades was a lady), and at least at first they didn't avoid the carnality, though they tended to end up turning Augustinian in later life. And finally, Freud's studies of the pathologically horny Viennese bourgeoisie,with their multiple layers of rigid conventionality, led him to base an entire psychology on sexual obsession, and his true believers came to think of sexual obsession as a necessary part of mental health, even an obligation. In sexology as in philosophy, we really have to ask ourselves whether we have been on the right track.

Monomania as Philosophy

Descartes, tr. Clarke, *Discourse on Method*, Penguin, 1999 (DM).

René Descartes, tr. Ariew / Cress, *Meditations,* Hackett, 2006 (M).

I was then in Germany, where I had been drafted because if the wars going on there, and as I was returning to the army from the emperor's coronation, the arrival of winter delayed me in quarters where, finding no company to distract me and, luckily, having not cares or passions to trouble me, I used to spend the whole day alone in a room that was heated by a stove, where I had plenty of time to concentrate on my own thoughts.... (DM, p. 11).

If this were the beginning of a short story, we would know what to expect next: cabin fever and perhaps haunting by ghosts, proceeding step by step to suicide, hopeless insanity, or bloody murder. And in fact, Descartes did experience quite considerable distress:

As I consider these problems more carefully, I see so plainly that there are no definite signs by which to distinguish being awake from being

> *asleep. As a result, I am becoming quite dizzy, and my dizziness nearly convinces me that I am asleep.....Yesterday's meditation has thrown me in such doubts that I can no longer ignore them, yet I fail to see how they are to be resolved. It is as if I had suddenly fallen into a deep whirlpool; I am so tossed about that I can neither touch bottom with my foot, nor swim to the top.* (M, pp. 10-13).

He comes to doubt the most evident facts of life (*things which no one of sound mind has ever seriously doubted*: p. 9), such as the existence of the physical world, the existence of his body, and the simplest laws of logic, and descends into paranoia:

> *Accordingly I will suppose not a supremely good God, the source of all truth, but rather an evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me. I will regard the heavens, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things as nothing but the bedeviling hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares for my credulity. I will regard myself as not having hands,, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or any senses, but as nevertheless falsely believing that I possess all these things. I will remain resolute and steadfast in this meditation.* (M, p. 12).

Rather than resisting his madness, Descartes embraces it and firmly hold to it:

> *My maxim was to be as firm and resolute as possible in my actions and to follow the most doubtful views, once I had decided to do so, just as steadfastly as if they were very certain, thereby imitating travelers who, when they find themselves lost in a forest, should not make the mistake of turning in one direction after another, or even less, of staying in the same place, but should always walk in one direction in as straight a line as possible and not change it for trivial reasons , even if initially it was only chance that determined them to choose it. For in this way, if they do not arrive exactly where they wish, they will eventually arrive somewhere....* (DM, p. 20).

He finds a city (Amsterdam) where his madness will be accommodated:

> *It is exactly eight years since this desire made me move away from all the places where I had acquaintances and to retire here....where I have been able to live as solitary and withdrawn a life as in the most remote deserts, without lacking*

> *any of the conveniences that are available in the busiest town.* (DM, p. 24).

Alone with his troubled mind, he takes that very mind to be the standard of all truth and reality. The clear and distinct ideas that this mind was unable to doubt were true; and beyond clarity and distinctness as an unquestioned standard of reality, "perfection" and "substance" are now introduced from God knows where.

> *I judged that I could adopt as a general rule that those things that we conceive very distinctly and clearly are all true. The only outstanding difficulty is in recognizing which ones we conceive distinctly. Then, by reflecting on the fact that I doubted and that, consequently, my being was not completely perfect -- for I saw clearly that it was a greater perfection to know than to doubt -- I decided to find out where I learned to think about something more perfect than myself and I knew clearly that this had to be from some nature that was in fact more perfect.* (DM, p. 15).

> *I knew from this that I was a substance, the whole essence and nature of which was to think and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place and does not depend of anything material.*

> *Thus this self -- that is, the soul by which I am what I am -- is completely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than it, and even if the body did not exist the soul would still be everything that it is.* (DM, p. 25).

From this point he believes it possible to come to a knowledge which he regards as total, just as his former illusion and ignorance had been posited as total:

> *Since there is only one truth about each thing, whoever discovers it knows as much as is possible to know about it....* (DM, p. 17).

Now, all of these traits are characteristic of monomania: the denial of everyday reality, the solipsistic definition of truth, the complete autonomy of the disembedded mind, the need for clarity and simplicity, the need for perfection, and the claim of complete truth. Descartes is not completely frank about the depth of his distress during his episode of cabin fever, but his extreme response to it -- the logic-chopping construction of a complete philosophical system with which to armor himself -- tells us that it was very severe. After boldly having doubted even the existence of his own body, and even more notably, after coming to fear that other supposed humans were actually just clever automatons, he rushes on to the proof (on the basis of principles not in evidence) of

propositions much more doubtful than the ones he denied. From systematically denying the evident, Descartes now moves to the stout affirmation of the doubtful (the immortality of the soul, the existence of a perfect God).

Descartes' paranoid construction soon joined Socrates' fantasy idealizations of handsome young soldiers to become the second foundation of modern Western philosophy. In fact, Descartes' episode of cabin fever occurred while he was in the Bavarian army, and the philosophy of mind he built on this foundation provided the basis which made it possible to replace the Socrates' rapey, erotic men of war (the Macedonians, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Saracens, the Mongols, et. al,) with the new model army: the solipsistic, abstemious warriors of the the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the absolutist and romantic-nationalist eras, and so on up to the present. (In general, bizarre philosophies or religions are required to inculcate troops with the combination of disciplined cruelty and suicidal fearlessness required for their line of work).

Likewise, it is from the Socratic / Cartesian meld of erotic projection and solipsism that have come the delusional, insatiable rationalities of the modern age: paranoid madmen, romantics in search of the unattainable Absolute, cutting edge avant-gardists and

nihilists wreaking their imaginary havoc, the sovereign state, global capitalism, the multinational corporation, insatiable bourgeois consumers, and the predatory, ever-expanding research university.

What is Real?

When the word “real” first appeared in English, it meant “royal” (1350) or “a royal individual” (1399). The meaning “landed property” was first seen in 1448. The philosophical and commonsense meanings of the word appeared later: “real” as opposed to “nominal” (1519); the “real presence” in the sacrament (1559); “genuine, sincere, loyal” (1559); “actually existing” (1597); and finally, “a Spanish coin, the real” (1612).

In Spanish and especially Portuguese, both the concrete physical meanings and the royal meanings which are now obsolete in English still survive. In Portuguese these are the definitions of “real”: “1. A silver coin; 2. Campground, village, royal festivity; 3. Royal, splendid, etc; 4. Real, true, honest.” In these two languages *realista* still means both “royalist” and “realist”. In medieval Spanish, *real* meant “*albergue de regale*”, or “royal protection”, whereas *realme*”, somewhat like “realm”, means a line of hereditary succession to a domain.

So what about French? In Old French, *le real* meant a kind of sturgeon[1] whereas *reale* meant either a kind of royal coin, or a ship designated for the use of royalty, but neither of these terms apparently survived into modern French. In Old French, from the XIIc on *reel* and *reelité* referred to “real property”, as in English,

and in modern republican French, the word *réel* now has all the meanings that "real" has in modern English, but not the royal meanings found in Middle English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Ultimately the words *real* and *réel* trace back to Latin, and it seems that there are two derivations: one from *rex* "king" + *al*, "kingly", and one from *res* "thing" + *al* "thinglike" (whence the renominalized *realis*, "a thinglike entity"). Presumably the first of these was developed in law and government, with special reference to property and royalty, whereas the second was developed philosophically during the realist-nominalist controversies in the universities (where the word appeared in Latin before it did in the vernacular languages.) When the two words merged, the two kinds of meanings became partly confused, and "real" confusedly came to mean both "actual" (as in "a real nightmare"), and "great or good" (as in "a real man", which means something much more than "an actual man".)

Now, if the "real" is thing-ish, what does "thing" mean? In Old English, "thing" originally most often meant "assembly" and "cases discussed at assemblies" -- the Icelandic *Allthing* did not mean "all things", but "a place where cases of all kinds are discussed". (There was even a verb *thingen*, meaning "to discuss or negotiate", as there still is in Swedish.) From the beginning,

however, the word also meant “a material substance”, or “a particular object”, and “things” could mean either real or movable property. So while "thing" tends to mean something material and concrete, it also means anything that can be thought about, talked about, or dealt with, and again there is is the connection with property.

So we could paraphrase Kant, “A hundred real *reals* are not a *centavo* more than a hundred possible *reals.*” Seemingly, The Real is the cash value -- the kingly, the important, the inherited realm, the landed property, and the gold and silver coins. Philosophical realism is the philosophy for which Ideas or Forms are important because they are royal, and real because they are thinglike. (This seemingly destroys the power that the Ideas supposedly gain from their distinction from mere perishable physical objects, though philosophers have always tended to be evasive on this point). In Spain and Portugal, royalty remains "real" to this day, whereas in France since 1789, even the word *real* itself has been banished from the language.

And what does Lacan have to say about all this?

"*The Real is impossible.*"

Thanks, Jacques.

German: *Als Meister Eckhart das Wort im 13.Jahrhundert aus dem lateinischen "actualitas" (="Wirksamkeit") übersetzte, dachte der Mystiker nicht an den heutigen Wortgebrauch und den Begriff Realität, der seit dem 18.Jahrhundert underen Sprachalltag beherrscht. Er dachte vielmehr an die Geschehnisse, die aus dem Wirken oder aus dem Handeln resultieren.*

Note

1. *«Le real»: espèce d'esturgeon, selon P. Lacroix* (Godefroy, *Lexique de l'ancien français).*

Sources: *OED, Merriam-Webster, Oxford-Hachette, Dauzet, Godefroy, Cassell's Spanish-English, Cejador y Frauca, and Michaelis).*

The Cynic Emperor

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, tr. Hard, intro. Gill, Wordsworth Classics, 1997.

Let people see, let them study, a true man who lives according to nature. If they cannot bear with him, let them kill him! For it were better to die than to live such lives as theirs.

Meditations, 10.15

Anyone who tries to live his life according to principle will normally be regarded as a prig. Marcus Aurelius even predicted what some of us would think of him:

Suppose that he [the deceased] is serious-minded and wise, there is sure to be someone there at the last [at the funeral] who will say of him , "What a relief to be finally freed from this schoolmaster; not that he was ever harsh with us, but I could sense that he was silently condemning us." (10.36)

In Marcus' case, there's also the imperial factor: somehow his advice about facing adversity rings false when you realize that during the time when he was

writing his book, he was the Emperor (or heir-apparent) of perhaps the greatest empire the world has ever seen.

On the other hand, his qualifications for giving advice about resisting temptation are excellent, and for an Emperor (and certainly by contrast to such imperial predecessors as Nero and Tiberius) he lived a wonderfully temperate and benevolent life. He was unimpressed by the Emperor biz:

> *Take care that you are not turned into a Caesar, that you are not stained with the purple; for such things do come about. (6.30)*
>
> *Go on, then, talk to me of Alexander and Philip and Demetrius. If they saw what the universal nature wishes and trained themselves accordingly, I will follow them; but if they merely strutted around like stage heroes, no one has condemned me to imitate them. (8.3)*

Marcus counts as a Stoic, but he also had Epicurean tendencies and, as I see it, an unmistakable Cynic streak. With him cynicism didn't manifest itself in antinomianism, as it does in our day, but in an ascetic detachment from, or even a contempt for, such conventional goals of life as power, wealth, reputation, pleasure, and comfort. (Though again, one doubts that

he had any idea what it would be like to be destitute and genuinely powerless.)

> *All that is highly prized in life is hollow, putrid, and trivial; puppies snapping at one another, little children bickering, and laughing, and then all at once in tears. (5.33)*

His cynicism even led him to paranoia:

> *Let people see, let them study, a true man who lives according to nature. If they cannot bear with him, let them kill him! For it were better to die than to live such lives as theirs. (10.15)*

The Meditations are addressed to "you" -- to Marcus himself, or to the generic reader (us). It's mostly ethical reminders, exhortations and advice. Often enough, it seems that Marcus was refreshing himself on the best way to deal with a particular kind of problem he had just encountered -- e.g., "annoying people". Most of the time, he seems to be reaching for a new statement of one of his main ideas. The book has no apparent overall plan, though certain themes cluster in certain sections.

His book has been admired for its naturalism. He speaks of the gods, but these are distant and impersonal (the stars) and require only the conventional sacrifices. He also speaks of a singular God, but this seems only

to be the single governing principle of the universe, which is shared by men as the governing principle of their own lives.

> *Revere the highest power in the universe, the power that makes use of all things and presides over all. And likewise, revere the highest power in yourself: this power is of one kind with the other. (5.21)*
>
> *You honor your governing faculty alone and what is divine in you. (12.1)*
>
> *One animal soul is distributed amongst irrational creatures, and one rational soul has been divided amongst rational creatures. (9.8)*

He regards all outcomes as inevitable, and toys with the Epicurean idea that events are entirely the result of chance and mere physical causes. He teaches us to uncomplainingly accept constant change and the inevitable perishing of everything, including ourselves, without an afterlife. And since everything is inevitable, and either the result of a benevolent design or of pure chance, it is unreasonable and unnatural to complain about anything.

Either a hotchpotch and the entangling of atoms and their dispersal, or unity, order, and evidence. (6.10)

Whatever happens to you was preordained from time everlasting, and from eternity the web of causations was weaving together your existence and this that befalls you. (10.5)

Perhaps a man who is worthy of the name should put aside this question of how long he should live, and not cling to life, believing what old wives say, that "no one can escape his destiny", and turn his attention to this instead, to how he can live the best life possible in the time that is granted to him. (7.46)

Universal nature set out to create a universe; and now it is either the case that all that comes to be does so as a necessary consequence of that, or else even the most important things, to which the governing faculty directs its own efforts, lie outside the rule of reason. Remember this, and you will face every trouble with a calmer mind. (7.75)

To the Epicurean "atoms and the void" he prefers the Stoic idea that everything is governed by divine providence -- an established order which tends

inevitably toward the good. In this he deviates from naturalism in the direction of a belief in design and preordained outcomes, and his supposed determinism seems more like religious fatalism. The visible and efficacious gods he refers to are the stars, leading one also to suspect that he was at least tempted by the claims of astrology.

> *To those who ask, 'Where have you seen the gods, or what evidence do you have of their existence, that you worship them so devoutly? I reply that they are in fact visible to our eyes, ... from what I experience of their power at every moment of my life, I ascertain that they exist and pay them due reverence. (12.28; n. pp. 151, 153)*

> *Everything, such as a horse, say, or a vine, has come into being for a purpose; and why should you wonder at that? The Sun himself would say "I was born to perform a function", and so would the rest of the gods. (8.19)*

> *Constantly think of the universe as a single living being, comprised of a single substance and a single soul. (4.40)*

> *Now there is a single harmony which embraces all things. (5.8)*

> *All things are interwoven, and the bond that unites them is sacred, and hardly anything is alien to any other. (7.9)*

> *Nothing happens to anyone that he is not fitted by nature to bear.(5.18: compare I Corinthians, 10:13).*

There's a fudge in his presentation of design, however. Design works to the good of the whole, and Marcus merely asserts that, of course, nothing that works to the good of the whole could be thought to harm a part. This amounts to an unrealistic expectation of complete altruism from of the parts with regard to their own particular interests, an expectation which is most intelligible if it is understood as a demand, and we will see below that he has nothing but contempt for those who kick and scream when being led to the slaughter.

> *Nothing which benefits the whole brings harm to the part. (10.6; also 6.45.)*

> *What universal nature brings to each thing is to the benefit of that thing, and to its benefit at just the time that she brings it. (10.20)*

His teaching about how to relate to one's fellow man is mild, showing nothing of the famous Roman

sternness. We should never react with anger, but (knowing that misbehavior, too, is part of the inevitable plan) should only ask ourselves how it was that the offender came to act the way that he did:

> *You are angry at a man if he smells of stale sweat, or if he has bad breath? What good will it do you? He has such a mouth, and such armpits....(5.28)*

> *Whenever someone wrongs you, ask yourself at once, "What conception of good and evil led him to commit such a wrong?" (7.26)*

He goes beyond this to recommend that our attitude toward others be love, since we are all parts of the same whole. (It may be noted, however, that this love is a rather condescending, schoolmasterly one):

> *It is a special characteristic of man to love even those who stumble. And this love is realized as soon as the thought strikes you that these are your relations and do wrong through ignorance and against their will..... (7.22)*

> *If you can, show them the error of their ways; but if you cannot, remember that kindness was granted to you for this. The gods themselves are kind to such people..... (9.11)*

It is impossible to cut a branch from its neighbor unless you cut it from the tree as a whole; and likewise, a human being cut off from a single one of his fellows has dropped out of the community as a whole. (11.8)

The monism breaks down here. Others are to be understood as ruled by blind causes, whereas we are to reject anger, which is "against Nature", and choose love. In fact, anger is the primary and possibly the only crime against Nature:

An angry expression on one's face is utterly contrary to nature. (7.24)

Consider every word and deed that accords with nature to be worthy of you.... (5.3)

In so far he is out of tune with universal nature, and gives rise to disorder by entering into conflict with the rational order of the universe. (9.1)

And whenever your governing faculty complains about anything that comes to pass, at that moment too it deserts its proper station. (11.20)

The soul of man does violence to itself when it becomes, so far as it can, an abscess and a sort of morbid outgrowth of the universe. For to set your mind against anything that comes to pass is to set yourself apart from Nature..... (2.16, also 4.29)

If the renunciation of anger against one's fellow man is benevolent almost to the point of Buddhism, the proposed renunciation of anger against one's fate and one's lot in life is imperial and oppressive. In any case, just as others are loved primarily as parts of the great whole to which we also belong, rather than as individuals, our unquestioning acceptance of the great whole to which we belong requires us to submit willingly to whatever happens.

When our author speaks of those rebels and complainers who wrongly resist the order of nature, his ultimate argument comes from the ethics of demeanor: you should accept your given role (for example as sacrificial victim) in a dignified way and not behave ignobly. (This is one of a number of ways in which his philosophy resembles Confucianism):

Look on anyone who is pained or discontented at anything that comes to pass as being like a little pig kicking and screaming at the sacrifice. (10.28)

What is the present content of the part of me which is commonly called the governing faculty? And whose soul do I have at present? That of an adolescent? That of a woman, of a tyrant, of a domestic animal, of a wild beast? (5.11)

One who flees from his master is a runaway slave; now the law is our master, and one who departs from it is therefore a runaway slave. (10.25)

The monism paradox, which is said to be insoluble, raises its head again here, for Marcus realizes that even ignoble people or angry people are playing their part in the order of Nature, and that there is in fact nothing that can be "against Nature". He does not go so far as the heretics of the fortunate fall, or the heretics who revered Judas, or the Buddhists who found even evil in the all-encompassing Buddha nature, but I would imagine that *stoïciens maudits*, who deliberately chose the inevitable ignoble roles for themselves, were to be found even then:

But take care that you assume no role such as that mean and ridiculous verse in the play which Chrysippus mentions. (6.42: Chrysippus had said that funny lines in comedies, like vice in the

universe, when seen from a providential standpoint, can play a beneficial function: n. p. 136).

When you are shocked by anyone's shameless behavior, ask yourself at once "Is it then impossible that there should be no shameless people in the world?" It is quite impossible. So you should not demand the impossible : this person is one of those shameless people who must necessarily exist in the world. (9.42)

If there was any doubt that the cosmology of The Meditations was politically and not scientifically grounded, and that Marcus speaks from the seat of power, the passages below (along with his passing remarks on the poor little pig and the runaway slave) should lay it to rest:

The universe should be regarded as a kind of constitutional state. (4.3)

If that be so, the world is a kind of state. For in what other common constitution can we claim that the whole world participates? (4.4)

Marcus Aurelius was The Man if anyone ever was, and it's easy enough to deconstruct him as a falsely-benign authoritarian patriarch -- in fact, that's

more or less what I just did. On the other hand, I've also spent a fair amount of time studying such genuine brutes as Genghis Khan, and Marcus's mildness is actually highly impressive. (I, for one, cannot be sure that I would restrain myself as effectively as he did if I had his power to put annoying people to death -- I could name names here.)

On the evidence of this text, it would also seem that the Roman Empire, at least during his reign, was much more civil and much less absolutist than we have thought. The main message, of course, remains the same: living your life deliberately is difficult, no matter who you are.

We are born amidst piss and shit

Inter faeces et urinam nascimur....
Quo me amat amat et canam meum.
St. Bernard of Clairvaux

St. Bernard to the contrary, being born amid piss and shit is the least of our problems. The groin area is also the pleasure center, the channel of fertility, the ever-flowing source of idealizing obsession and "romantic love", the nexus of self-esteem, the foundation for the extended family, and the primary path for the transmission of real property. The potential for interference between these various functions is enormous, and a competent engineer would never have linked them the way they now are. The worst error we could make with regard to *eros* is to hope that this kludgy apparatus will work the way we would wish; what we really should hope for is just to fend off disaster.

Given this horribly designed system, the peoples of the world have come up with many more or less unsatisfactory sociocultural ways of satisficing *eros*, and while some readers may conclude from what I have written in sections above that my message is just that the 19th century French erotic regime was a mess,

for me France (like America in a contrasting way) is just a type case. There is no actually- or formerly-existing regime that is significantly better -- we're just wired wrong, and all we can do is make the tradeoffs and chose our favored brand of kinds of misery.

But perhaps our situation as Westerners is especially dire. Two and a half millennia ago "sexuality" was sublimated by the horrible Greeks and transformed into idealized "reason". Once idealized (i.e., weaponized), sexuality / reason) became as lethal as AIDS, as durable as anthrax, and as sneaky as herpes. For most people during much of human history, sexuality / idealism has wallowed in the murk like some enormous, slimy, barbeled catfish, emerging only occasionally to engulf some hapless human victim. But well-meaning sexual / anti-sexual idealists like Augustine and Dante intermittently encouraged and strengthened the monster, and finally in 1830 (with the July Revolution and the opening of Hugo's play *Hernani*) the French romantics and liberals brought this undead creature from mud to land. For almost two centuries now Sexuality, Reason and Power have been going where they will, wreaking havoc and devouring any who dare come its way.

The romantics were the shock troops and sappers of sexuality, and their task was to soften up the honky world for the what was to come. "Liberty" and "equality" meant that anyone could presume to desire

anything they wanted without being accused of encroaching on others' prerogatives. "Liberty" and "equality" meant that anyone could presume to desire anything they wanted without being accused of encroaching on others' prerogatives. Since, as Malthus pointed out, the aggregate quantity of desire increases geometrically, whereas the aggregate quantity of possible satisfaction increases only arithmetically, overall dissatisfaction is mathematically certain. Furthermore, only cheap, trashy people are easily satisfied -- an attainable or attained object is by definition degraded and unworthy. Kant, Lamartine, Novalis, and others have taught us that only the Ideal is good enough, and marketing just picked it up from there.

Equality and liberty did not preclude competition, and with improved means of transportation and communication the field of competition came to be everywhere. Every literate young man imprisoned in one of the modern European languages was drafted into a global contest — first to find the most unattainable ideal of all, and then to immolate himself on it. No wonder they were all so whiny. (And yes, "himself". Women were part of this only as unattainable objects. No hopeless striving for you, ladies!)

Probably Plato was well-intended when he devised his celibate reform *eros*, but what a monster he unloosed upon the world! Many have tried to tame or defeat sexuality, but each attempt has only made it stronger and more horrible. Repression, chastity, marriage, idealization, libertinism, liberation, naturalness, "relationships", psychoanalysis, bisexuality, polyamorousness, intersexuality, transgendering, queering – nothing has worked, and sexuality still claims countless new victims each day. This creature has no benign forms and cannot be resisted, and all we can do now is resign ourselves to our sexual fates, whatever they may be, and hope for some post-sexual Beowulf or Parsifal to come along to drive a stake into the beast's gigantic, loathsome head.

Note: From time to time someone will come to me with the claim that *eros* is ecstatically wonderful, adducing their own life as evidence. My response is that obviously no one ever would buy a lottery ticket if no one ever won the lottery, and that if you happen to find yourself at the top of the roller coaster ride, you should enjoy your time there to the fullest.

Glories of the Second Empire

The premature death of Morny [the half-brother and right-hand man of Napoleon the Third] *has been attributed by some to his habit, common among fashionable Parisians, of taking not only "blue pills" (mercury with glycerin and honey of rose, widely used in the 19th century both as an anti-depressant and as a purgative) but also arsenic, reputed to be a youth preserver.*

Virginia Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales,* Bloomsbury, 2003, pp. 211-213

Judith Gautier had complimented Pierre Loti on the rare proportion — only to be found in Greek statues — of the second toe to in relation to the big one; according to the canon, it should be considerable longer. By wearing sandals on his bare feet, Loti had succeeded in emphasizing that detail, of which he was, in fact, very proud.

Joanna Richardson, *Judith Gautier*, Quartet, 1986, p. 152.

"Catulle Mendės never talked to me about Judith, except when one summer day when a big fly was buzzing between the curtain and the window panes. 'Judith was very clever at swatting flies', he murmured, 'they used to say that that was connected with Satanism. The demoniacs called Beelzebub Lord of the Flies'."

Richardson, p. 167.

Suzanne Meyer-Zundel was intellectually lazy, she had small interest in books, and she could not write acceptable French. Her only gift appears to have been the unusual gift of modeling flowers out of breadcrumbs, an occupation at which she showed an unchallenged skill.

Richardson, pp. 185-186.

The Czarist regime in two anecdotes

St. Petersburg,
Solomon Volkov.

The impresario Diaghilev, who played an enormous role in the development of early 20th c. music and ballet, was a talentless, unscrupulous charlatan. How do we know this? Because of what he wrote to his stepmother, to whom he was very close:

> *I am, first of all, a great charlatan, although brilliant, and secondly, a great charmer, and thirdly, very brazen, and fourthly, a man with a great amount of logic and a small amount of principles, and fifthly, I believe, without talent; however, if you like, I believe I have found my real calling – patronage of the arts. For that, I have everything except money, but that will show up.*

2.

In 1881 Czar Alexander II was killed by nihilist assassins.[1] Czar Alexander III knew he needed to do something to restore Russia's confidence, so for 15,000 rubles he commissioned the world's first Fabergé egg and gave it to the Czarina on Easter.

Imperial Russia wasn't into pragmatism and efficiency. Assassination is a poor way of achieving political goals (though nihilists basically believe that nothing is possible anyway). And equally so, Fabergé eggs are an ineffective response to social unrest.

Note

1. I have been informed that Czar Alexander's assassins were not nihilists, and that the so-called "nihilists" were not really nihilists either. But assassination remains an inefficient method for achieving social goals.

Where it all starts

> *Natalya, however , remembers Yezhov with love. "He spent a lot of time with me, more even than my mother did. He made tennis rackets for me. He made skates and skis. He made everything for me himself." At the dacha, Yezhov taught her to play tennis, skate, and ride a bicycle. He is remembered as a gentle, loving father showering her with presents and playing with her in the evenings after returning from the Lubyanka.*
>
> Robert Chandler, "Appendix" to Vasily Grossman, *The Road*.

Yezhov was the head of NKVD and presided over the Stalinist terror during 1937 and 1938; after being replaced by Beria in 1939, he was shot in 1940. He was responsible for the deaths of a million people, give or take, including large chunks of the Russian intelligentsia.

Yezhov was nice to his daughter. Stalin was nice to his daughter. Adolf Eichmann was nice to his kids. Hitler was nice to children and dogs.

People! Quit being nice to children!

That's where it all starts!

The end of civilization as we wish we had known it

Berthelot went on with his dispiriting revelations, at the end of which I exclaimed:

“So it’s all over? There’s nothing left for us to do but to rear a new generation to exact vengeance?”

“No, no,” cried Renan, standing up and going red in the face, “no, not vengeance! Let France perish, let the Nation perish; there is a higher ideal of Duty and Reason!”

“No, no,” howled the whole company. “There is nothing higher than The Nation!”.

Goncourts, September 6, 1870, p.172.

He told me too about a Chinese envoy who had arrived in Paris during our siege and mid-Commune, in the midst of our cataclysm, and to whom someone had remarked "You must find this extremely surprising". "No, not at all", he replied. "You are young, you Westerners, you have hardly any history to speak of. ... It has always been like this.... The Siege and the Commune are everyday events for the human race".

Goncourts, p. 194

"There is nothing higher than The Nation!". The invading Germans had just captured Napoleon III with his army, and Paris was surrounded. The Second Empire was overthrown and a provisional government proclaimed, but the military situation remained grim and within five months France would surrender and be forced to accept an unfavorable peace. Very few Frenchmen held to Renan's humane universal values; the call for vengeance was much more compelling. As far as that goes Germany (now become an empire in place of France and alongside Britain, sort of -- Victoria was Empress only of India) wasn't satisfied with the outcome either, and would soon enough come back for more.

> *The captain remarked that was fighting between the Turkish troops and the Serbians, who are in revolt. The Russians intend to stir up a quarrel and then sit by and reap their reward. Since England, France, and Germany see that it would be to their detriment if Russia were to have full access to the Dardanelles Straits, they have been earnestly deliberating as to how they might protect them…. In their hearts the Russians fear the assistance that the English might render to the Turks, so they do not dare to act presumptuously. Since the Turks have recently agreed to settle the trouble in Turkey, their joint*

efforts make it seem unlikely that the various powers of Europe will be embroiled in a general war. (January 13, 1877)

Kuo Sung-t'ao, in J.D. Frodsham, *The First Chinese Embassy in the West*, p. 65.

Six years later a different Chinese envoy kept a record of the long sea voyage taking him to his post. During his trip he improved his knowledge of the Western nations and the relationships between them, and as it happened, he reached the Mediterranean right when Russia and Turkey were engaged in a dispute about Serbia, with all the other powers hovering on the wings to keep things from getting out of hand. *"Their joint efforts make it seem unlikely that the various powers of Europe will be embroiled in a general war",* wrote the Ambassador. And he was right at the time, but he had put his finger on the place where the general war would in fact break out 37 years later. In 1914 it was Russia v. Austria-Hungary instead of Russia v. Turkey, but it was the same game.

The sovereign nation-state is a war machine and the international order is a system for scheduling wars. Already by 1870 culture was pretty much at the service of the state, and by 1914 most of the left and avant-garde enthusiastically committed themselves to the murderous, pointless Great National Causes of their various homelands. All hell broke loose, and the world would never be the same again.

An Avenue of Assassins

The military authorities of Bosnia and the secret-police organizations made such insufficient preparations for the protection of the Archduke and his wife that seven would-be murderers were counted at the criminal investigation after the catastrophe, and Archbishop Stadler of Sarajevo was really justified in saying that the Archduke was sent into a regular avenue of assassins.

The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, Oscar Jaszi, Chicago 1961, p. 125.

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These sites were helpful on etymology:
http://www.insenses.org/chimeres/glossaire.html;
http://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/;
http://www.russki-mat.net;
http://www.etymonline.com /index.php;
http://www.littre.reverso.net/dictionnaire-francais/;
http://www.cntrl.fr/etymologie/
http://www.micmap.org/dicfro/;
http://www.www.bibleone.net.
https://books.google.com/ngrams