Andrew Chen on
Poetry’s New Sincerity

Richard G. Stern on
Tragi-farce, Simulacra, Libby, and Lear

Ji Xia on
The Trauma of “I Claim”

Kira Bennett on
The Faux Feminism of Twilight

Ben Brubaker on
Heroes and Villains in Watchmen

Ardevan Yaghoubi on
The Space of the University

and

Noah Ennis on
First Looking into Lapham’s Quarterly
The Midway Review is a forum for civil debate across the political spectrum and among the humanities and social science disciplines, and for reflection on current events, culture, politics, religion, and philosophy.

We are accepting submissions to be considered for our Spring 2009 issue. Please consult http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/ for submission guidelines.

Letters to the editor may be addressed to midwayreview@uchicago.edu. We ask that letters for publication be limited to 350 words.

The Midway Review is printed by Press America Inc. on thrice-recycled paper.

Publication of the Midway Review is made possible by the Student Government Finance Committee, the College of the University of Chicago, and the Collegiate Network.
New Sincerity in a Postmodern World
Andrew Chen
So what is New Sincerity? It represents a return to universality, emotion, and a renewed concern with the human condition.

Oppositional Politics under President Obama: Thoughts on a Left Approach
Aaron Greenberg and Adwait Parker
The left critique must adapt to a super-competent, sophisticated and politically sympathetic president—a much harder target than the eight years of conservative failure that preceeded him.

The Tension of Conservatism
Jeremy Rozansky
Conservatives need to see their infighting in the context of the history of postwar American conservatism.

Reading Lapham’s Quarterly
Noah Ennis
From the thesis of an amnesiac media and the antithesis of a ponderous, unreadable parade of tomes, Lapham synthesizes a sleek, artfully decorated volume of distilled thoughts on a single theme of contemporary and enduring significance.

Behind “I Claim”: the Dialectics of Writing
Ji Xia
Programmatic language creates at once an excess and a lack, and I consider this the major dilemma behind “I claim,” which haunts me as my writing appears presumptuous and inadequate.

Saul Bellow, Literary Columbus
Elliot Hasdan
Bellow gives America a modern voice that rattles us and affirms that we’re not through with serious novels and characters.

(Continued on next page.)
An Orderly Miscellany
Richard G. Stern
The need of a country like the post-Marshall Plan United States for tragi-farce is enormous.

Sapere Aude!
Aaron B. Roberts
Barton is successful in perspicuously presenting what might plausibly be said to constitute the defining principles of biblical criticism. Still, the deeper question is whether his description and defense of biblical criticism lives up to his claim that biblical criticism approaches the text “on its own terms.”

Economics and Politics: Inequality in Partisan Politics
Dmitri Leybman
Bartels’s work will help dispel some of these myths about the saliency of “culture issues” in shaping the voting behavior of the working and lower-middle classes.

Fearful Symmetry: Looking Beneath the Surface of Alan Moore’s Watchmen
Ben Brubaker
By weaving overt oppositions and subtle parallels between Rorschach and Veidt into Watchmen, Moore warns his readers not to condemn one self-proclaimed hero as a hypocrite while letting the actions of another go unmonitored.

The Sexual Politics of Twilight
Kira Bennett
To say that Twilight is a faithful depiction of a bygone time is to dangerously oversimplify its attitude toward gender roles and sexual politics, which in truth is much more nuanced and formidable.

The Space of the University: Notes from the Underground
Ardevan Yaghoubi
What is in play today is nothing short of a wide-ranging attempt to reframe the University using standards of instrumental logic.

Sources
The notion of a New Sincerity can be traced back to 2002, when Public Radio International’s program *The Sound of Young America* proposed a cultural movement that would live simply by the maxim “Be More Awesome.” In its disdain for a postmodern culture steeped in irony, the Southern California-based public radio show imagined a lifestyle oriented toward—as they playfully put it—“Maximum Fun.” Three years later in San Francisco, poets Andrew Mister and Anthony Robinson were discussing, in a similarly lighthearted manner, the increasing partiality of poetry journals to poetry saturated with irony, a trend that in their opinion marginalized much of what poetry stood for as an art form. They noted an impulse in certain poets, as well as in their own poetry, to oppose the trend.

Shortly after this conversation, Mister and Robinson expressed their observations to a mutual friend, California poet Joseph Massey; together, the three of them began piecing together poetry’s version of New Sincerity. Primarily communicated through blog posts and casual correspondence, their New Sincerity began—like *The Sound of Young America*—as a joke venting irritation at what they, along with perhaps a growing faction of the intellectual and artistic community, identified in poetry as postmodern parody of anything that purported to aim for real meaning. Each of the three wrote a manifesto. Massey’s, which came first, consisted largely of not-so-bashful scorn for what many identify as hipster culture.

Soon after its inception, however, the three poets, along with a growing following, began believing in their New Sincerity. In Robinson’s manifesto, written some time after Massey’s, he writes of their simultaneous realization that what began as a joke was, in fact, exactly consonant with their artistic ideals. “In simplest terms,” Robinson writes, “the New Sincerist poets try to write and promote poetry that is more than just jokes, or just postmodern, post-language, post-avant, post-Lacan, or post-whatever. Poetry that is about theory, or that is overwhelmed by theory is not interesting to us. Neither is poetry that keeps winking at us, winking at itself without really talking.” This last idea is particularly important to the New Sincerists—the Noam Chomskyan problem with postmodernism that it appears unable to delineate its own ideals—perhaps because it seems, necessarily, to have none.

So what is New Sincerity? First and foremost, it candidly strives for meaning—whatever that means for the individual poet. It represents a return to universality and emotion, and a renewed concern with the human condition. It is not, however, a return to sentimentalism, which postmodernism also repudiates. Unlike sentimentalism, which has as its purpose the elicitation of a strong emotional response, New Sincerity seeks to capture a certain authenticity in objects and images; and, in effectively rendering this authenticity, to engender what for them is a more meaningful emotional response. In a poem from his most recent chapbook, *Out of Light*, Massey writes:

```
Light’s token
to shadow
these winter-
stripped
limbs,
thawing,
shake over
the sidewalk’s
pocked
inscriptions.
```

New Sincerity is also not a return to realism. As Robinson writes in his manifesto, “New Sincerity does not mean ‘total honesty’ or ‘complete fidel-

Andrew Chen is a third-year in the College, majoring in English Language and Literature.
ity to lived/actual experience.’” Whereas realism seeks to deliver an accurate illustration of images and objects in and of themselves, for the New Sincerists the poetic image or object is always captured purposefully with respect to the poet. Thus although honest rendering is an important goal, so is the ensuing emotional response—often achieved through the poet’s mental interactions with the poem’s object throughout the poem. For this reason the New Sincerist poem is both centered on the object and the poet himself as he exists in relation to the object. Mister, in “(1:06 a.m.)” writes:

meanwhile in the city
known
for shipwrecks, night
bleeds
around the cars in the
7-11
parking lot. the snow
stopped falling,
though we
can still hear it
pouring
out of the cutlass supreme’s
radio.

The vision of the poet as renderer of objects and places is of the utmost importance for the New Sincerists. Later in the same poem:

how dearly,
the night holds the damp.
the twine that holds a thought
suspended above your head
severs the thought. the resolve
to sit in that car all night knowing
the next day is dust on your hands.

New Sincerity is also notable for its medium—blogs. Massey, Mister, and Robinson (“Rootedfool,” “Houseboadays,” and “Luckyerror,” respectively) routinely publish new poems on their well-kept blogs and receive feedback from one another as well as from their sizeable readerships. Furthermore, the evolution of New Sincerity is quite traceable through their cyberspace interactions. After Massey finished his manifesto—which, like those of the other New Sincerists, took the form of a blog entry—he received an enormous influx of responses and incited a great deal of buzz on blogs and internet forums, which, as the New Sincerists themselves will attest, are in a large part responsible for New Sincerity’s growth as a movement. If nothing else, blog conversations expedited the realization that New Sincerity could possess serious implications as a movement if it continued to evolve.

If nothing else, blog conversations expedited the realization that New Sincerity could possess serious implications as a movement if it continued to evolve.

At this point it’s unclear where New Sincerity is headed. The initial excitement has ebbed, and while its blog-driven nature was in many ways ideal for stimulating immediate hype, it also makes it hard for New Sincerity to sustain its momentum in the same way the more permanent nature of print would allow.

That said, Massey, Mister, and Robinson have all published major print works in the past couple of years, and other poets that have been identified as New Sincerists—whether by themselves or by other members of the writing community—have also published important work. Reb Livingston, the fourth poet mentioned in any discussion of New Sincerity due to the popularity of her blog (Cacklingjackal) and its conversations with Massey’s, was featured in the 2006 edition of *The Best American Poetry*, an annual anthology compiled by ex-United States Poet Laureate Billy Collins and respected editor David Lehman.

However, the most vital indicator of The New Sincerity’s success will be its continued existence as a cohesive movement. Many poets before and after Massey, Mister, and Robinson have displayed an impulse toward the sincere in similar ways—various critics have named a diverse group that includes Mary Oliver, Dean Young, Tao Lin, and Denise Levertov—but what distinguishes New Sincerity is its self-assertion as a movement, and thus its success will depend on whether it can con-
continue as a movement. Proponents of New Sincerity never have any difficulty naming artists across mediums they identify as aligned with the mission of New Sincerity; filmmaker Wes Anderson, for example, is commonly cited. The problem is that these artists do not identify themselves as New Sincerists, and it seems that for New Sincerity to endure, more artists will need to start doing just that.

Robinson himself has acknowledged this, and predicted that eventually both “new” and “sincerity” will be “bankrupt terms.” Despite this inevitability, Robinson continues to believe in the value of artistic authenticity, even though in a postmodern world it is often difficult to do so. Nevertheless, he writes in his manifesto that as New Sincerists, “We believe Wilde’s pronouncement that ‘All bad art is sincere.’ This makes New Sincerity dangerous, but necessary, work.”
Barack Obama’s election was greeted with triumph and celebration. The Bush years were officially and radically over. American liberalism had finally made good on its promise. The phrase “post-racial” sounded through the media, and self-congratulation was the order of the day.

The November 4 New York Times’ editorial began:

This is one of those moments in history when it is worth pausing to reflect on the basic facts: An American with the name Barack Hussein Obama, the son of a white woman and a black man he barely knew, raised by his grandparents far outside the stream of American power and wealth, has been elected the 44th president of the United States.

It was a moment to be proud of. The Grant Park crowd broke into chants that hours earlier would have been unimaginable: “USA! USA! USA!” The flags that flew that night seemed different than the ones flown by war supporters in the early years of the Iraq invasion. This wasn’t jingoism; it was the sense that some American political possibility had been finally realized. Even, and especially, those on the left shared that pride and celebration.

But the Obama presidency will pose major challenges to traditional left-opposition.

In this essay we’d like to consider what it means to be “left” after the election and how a left can coherently form and articulate itself after eight years of anti-politics. The character and content of left critique must adapt to a super-competent, sophisticated and politically sympathetic president—a much harder target than the eight years of conservative failure that preceded him.

The critique will require strategic ambivalence. The celebratory urge is important. After nearly a decade of oppositional politics with total emotional and moral divestment from the state, the left must reengage.

But that reengagement comes with necessary caveats. We can’t expect Obama to do everything, to honor every demand, respond to every grievance. The government will act as governments do. Treating it otherwise would be naïve. Political theorist Wendy Brown aptly described this naïveté in a chapter of her 2001 book, Politics Outside of History, called “Moralism as Anti-Politics”:

[This naïveté] figures the state (and other mainstream institutions) as if it did not have specific political and economic investments, as if it were not the codification of various dominant social powers, but was, rather, a momentarily misguided parent who forgot her promises to treat all her children the same way.

There’s a special risk with the Obama presidency because his platform implicitly engaged class and race worries without ever explicitly treating them. He was a black candidate whose blackness was always contested. He sold himself as post-racial, and that discourse made his blackness easier to swallow. As Judith Butler and others have suggested, white racists did vote for him—not because they had overcome their bigotry but because they thought he would improve the economy.

A politics of racial identity transformed into one mobilized around collective class identity: there was room for everyone on “Main Street.” The rhetoric of economic solidarity dissolved political and social divisions and identities just as a politics of ethnic identity often dissolves and ignores class identity.

The class anxieties that McCain-Palin tried so hard to stoke with their aestheticized peasant
populism were successfully engaged by the Obama campaign.

But can a politics of “efficiency” over “ideology” follow through with the promise of a revitalized, egalitarian democracy? How much political and policy substance can survive an ethic of moderation and compromise? These are the kind of political question that a “left” in the Obama presidency must ask, and it must draw upon resources far beyond the politics of the past eight years.

II.

It’s true that the Bush administration and its political psychology laid the foundation for a discourse of demonization. But the left intensified the discourse, resorting to an easy narrative that explained all political, military and economic failures in reductive, causal terms: the Bush thugs (incompetent, secretive, zealous, fundamentalist, bigoted ideologues) ran the country and the world into the ground.

“Second Hitler” was a popular (faux-radical) way for liberals to express their frustration and hate. But instead of highlighting the administration’s severely reactionary character, Hitler comparisons relieved them of political responsibility: Hiterlian evil confers theological exception on its targets. Even less extreme and more common rhetoric told a story about character: psychological evils and failures, not the inadequacies built into American institutions.

Around the 2000 election a cottage industry emerged, emboldened by the Internet’s explosive growth—and perhaps they even emerged together. Liberal websites flourished; a virtual and sometimes real (e.g., February 15, 2003) community of dissenters and investigators joined to level the most outrageous claims against an administration that seemed capable of anything. Waves of books sold, alleging corruption, secrecy, and unprecedented executive power.

The truth of these allegations is less relevant than the way they shifted left strategy: instead of formulating substantive positions, the left produced indignant journalism.

According to a popular trope of the last eight years, the Bush presidency “radicalized” the country: even people who voted for him in 2000 soon saw him as a failed leader who reneged on his promises. He was an enemy so common to left and right that hawks like Richard Clarke frequently earned front-page articles on liberal sites. But what went on during that presidency was far from politics.

Bush stonewalled every substantial progressive demand. So the “left” ended up settling: it demanded basic competency, decency, transparency and adherence to constitutional law. The content of the Bush decisions were often secondary to their process. Indeed, in various Bush exposes it was often difficult to distinguish someone on the left from a disaffected Republican; it was rare to hear from a liberal any positive, normative political claims beyond those wishing desperately for a world without Bush.

This confused, short-sighted and anti-intellectual opposition encouraged a politics of knee-jerkism, of amorphous post-ideological atomism, where a command of “objective facts” (e.g., of the atrocity of the Iraq invasion) were more important than claims about structures or institutions that predated and postdate Bush. He was an easy target, worth condemning, but not at the expense of whatever coherent left sentiment survived 1989.

In short, the left discourse of the past eight years is totally inadequate to a President Obama.

A tone that was entirely negative and divested from political language and engagement won’t work for a president with progressive tendencies. Even if he hears and acts upon every grievance, politics won’t be over.

Political demands made upon President Obama must issue from something more than the consensus-based liberalism that his campaign espoused.

When Bush assumed unprecedented executive power the left took the bait and began locating “change” at the level of the White House. Political
engagement at the local level or at the level of historic struggles—for civil rights, workers’ rights, and so forth—took a back seat to the notion that there could be no change until Bush left office.

This was true, to some extent, but it leaves some members on the left who invested the most in Obama with a feeling of purposelessness. What do we do now that we have everything we want? Lost was the defining sense that real politics were peripheral to official, elective office.

III.

The risks regarding substantive political commitment along race and class lines are clear. But the Obama presidency poses a deeper, structural difficulty as well—one that could neuter a democratic politics of contest and disagreement.

Obama campaigned on promises of unity. He effectively described Senators Clinton and McCain as partisans of a tired, polarizing politics. But that message contained something more problematic: a politics of consensus over disagreement, of “political positions” drained of their substance. Take his nomination acceptance speech, for example:

We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country. The reality of gun ownership may be different for hunters in rural Ohio than for those plagued by gang-violence in Cleveland, but don’t tell me we can’t uphold the Second Amendment while keeping AK-47s out of the hands of criminals. I know there are differences on same-sex marriage, but surely we can agree that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters deserve to visit the person they love in the hospital and to live lives free of discrimination. Passions fly on immigration, but I don’t know anyone who benefits when a mother is separated from her infant child or an employer undercuts American wages by hiring illegal workers. This too is part of America’s promise—the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort.

Obama enjoyed nearly universal praise for the courage of this speech for its political sophistication and substantive promises. Yet the speech is emblematic of the way in which Obama disengages from the hard work of democratic disagreement, where his pragmatism leads to dissolution of political sentiment, neutralizing the passionate disagreements and principled positions that constitute democratic politics.

“Yes we can” is a double-edged sword. It inspired collective political action and investment in the state but also acted as a rejoinder, discouraging political pessimism, neutering political difference.

The campaign strategy that parsed every issue in language that made disagreement difficult, can threaten democratic discourse. The post-election question now drifts from the practical to the philosophical: from what we need to what we want.

What does Obama democracy look like? Answering that question will help frame the terms of a coherent left opposition.

“Unity” as a political and philosophical goal generates a fundamentally anti-democratic sentiment, namely, the devaluation of agonistic confrontation. In a rich passage from her 1999 article on the foundations of democratic political activity, political theorist Chantal Mouffe considers passionate contestation as a vital component of participation:

This question, pace the rationalists, is not how to arrive at a rational consensus reached without exclusion, that is, indeed, an impossibility. Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an “us” by the determination of a “them.” The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/Them distinction—which is what a consensus without exclu-
vision pretends to achieve—but the different way in which is established. … To come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity, it has more of a quality of a conversion than of rational persuasion. … To be sure, compromises are possible; they are part of the process of politics. But they should be seen as temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation.

While campaigning, there was doubtlessly a strategic advantage to Obama’s pragmatism. He needed to fight that polarization of American politics so keenly depicted in historian Rick Perlstein’s *Nixonland*, a magisterial political tale of how one politician effectively forged and stoked the fires of the Culture Wars that would define, divide, and embitter America for an entire generation.

But difference and conflict are constitutive of any well-developed democratic experience.

*Nixonland* does not teach us to overcome any and all polarizing politics, but that we must redefine— in productive terms—the oppositions that have bitterly divided the baby-boomer generation. This is what Frank Rich picks up on in his passionate and decisive *New York Times* Op-Ed on the inaugural invitation Obama extended to ultra-conservative evangelical pastor, Rick Warren:

> When Obama defends Warren’s words by calling them an example of the “wide range of viewpoints” in a “diverse and noisy and opinionated” America, he is being too cute by half. He knows full well that a “viewpoint” defaming any minority group by linking it to sexual crimes like pedophilia is unacceptable.

Rich invokes Warren’s outspoken views on homosexuality, views which many of Obama’s liberal supporters automatically oppose. Mouffe is right to consider political positions as styles of life, requiring conversion and not persuasion, and why Obama’s appeal to the free flow of ideas is unpersuasive to the diligent student of politics. The “idealistic” Obama brand in fact bears an insidiously cynical streak which discourages firm political commitment and encourages a political language that guarantees “universal” agreement.

In *The Audacity of Hope* Obama famously described himself as a “blank screen” onto which voters of all different types can project their desires. Obama has done well to conceal his convictions, which should worry those who understand that sometimes “change” requires dramatic and unequivocal action.

Given a democratic vision of political Babel, how can Obama define a new politics, instead of simply intervening into discourses and institutions that are already hopelessly troubled? How can we take the necessary action to assert new paradigms of political economy, of government-citizen relations, of *conviction* on what is right and wrong with Israel, of privacy and domestic civil rights, of international human rights, of respect for science and technology?

These issues do not carry two morally equal, balanced viewpoints. They also cannot be parsed in language that everyone will agree with. They call for a type of democracy that welcomes passions, confrontations, agonistic contest. To assert what is right over what is wrong, and to stand by one’s ideals, oppositional discourse should not succumb to the pacifying politics that tolerates intolerance.

If a contemporary left wants to remain relevant, it must celebrate the Obama presidency as an opportunity to ask more, to do more, to talk more, to listen more—to study and criticize Obama’s vision for American democracy, while supporting his most creative and important initiatives. It must also recognize that political opposition cannot be suffocated by state politics but must always live outside, working towards a world not yet instantiated.
After the Congressional “thumpin’” in 2006 and the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the Republican Party has entered the political wilderness. There has been some discussion in Republican circles as to whether Republicans’ failures are a result of the people’s rejection of their politicians, their policies, or their principles. They are responding to each possibility. Republicans are learning from the Obama campaign’s tools of networking and technological integration and are finding ways to adapt those mechanisms to Republican demographics. A popular book in party circles is Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam’s *Grand New Party*, a policy prescription of school choice, “pro-growth environmentalism,” and a reformed—but not abolished—welfare state aimed to meet the needs of the middle class family. Retooling campaigns and revising platforms are part of standard protocol for out-of-power parties, “The Contract With America” being the ultimate example; but when the time spent in the political wilderness involves ideological soul-searching, the fundamental coalitions loosen, perhaps permanently.

The electoral rejection of the Republican Party must, in some sense, be seen as a rejection of conservatism. Although ideologies do not receive legitimacy from elections, they do receive the ability to turn articulations into actions. The Republican Party in particular is wedded to ideology. The crucial question of the presidential primary debates was: is Rudy McRomney conservative enough? For the Democrats, the electoral drama was about demographics—who carried white women, young people, African-Americans, Latinos, or Rust Belt “Reagan Democrats.”

The question for conservatives is how to extend the ideological movement to attract swing-demographics while also adhering to whatever may be considered fundamental to conservatism. In response, conservatives have spent the past few months in the wilderness prioritizing. The revelation has been that conservatives have different priorities. Serious reform will cause some conservatives to identify more strongly with the movement and others to be alienated. Not to mention that libertarians, once conservative allies, have became frustrated with the Bush Administration, while Rockefeller Republicans have been driven out of office throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic. The fear now is one of schism—a schism that will retain ideological purity at the cost of electoral possibility. Conservatives, however, need to see their infighting in the context of the history of postwar American conservatism.

A week after the election, David Brooks characterized the infighting as generational in nature. “Reformers” want to use government, albeit in more creative market-structured ways, to appeal to the needs of swing-demographics. “Traditionalists” want a return to the Reagan/Goldwater “small-government” principles betrayed by Bush. Brooks claims they have also adopted the banner of rally—

Jeremy Rozansky is a first-year in the College.
The fear now is one of schism—a schism that will retain ideological purity at the cost of electoral possibility.

An examination of conservatism's tensions today yields, first, a debate over the character of the conservatives needed to influence people and win elections. National Review served as the first forum for intellectual conservative discourse, as well as conservatism's newfound connection with the electorate. Buckley embraced his newest role—figurehead—and, at times, held the movement together with the sheer force of his personality. Neither undiscriminating nor dogmatic, National Review's pages hosted numerous debates between conservatives.

Even with a forum, conservatism still lacked a uniting principle. Was it a philosophy or an ideology? Russell Kirk, an early contributor to National Review and the first intellectual historian of conservatism, thought of conservatism as a philosophy. Among conservatism's principles are: faith the immutable rule of divine intent, affection for social variety, conviction in the merits of order, belief in the link between private property and personal freedom, and “recognition that change and form are not identical.” Kirk's outline posits principles that are not derivatives of each other but are assertions that must be balanced. For example, social variety and order do not cohabitate as absolutes. Tension is defining and, in a way, animating. Inherent tension animates through adaptability and immutability. By fluctuating between parameters, conservatism can reflect contemporary anxieties. As such, intellectual conservatism during the Cold War saw the common conservative doctrine of portraying Western heritage in shades of individualism—against the collectivizing and standardizing behemoth. Today, the portrayal of the West is shaded in self-understanding. Although the shading changes, conservatism adheres to some parameters. That the parameters are immutable is settled; what these parameters are is not settled.

The most important figure in understanding the development of what we now recognize as American conservatism is William F. Buckley, Jr. Some have traced American conservatism from Edmund Burke, through the Founders, to George Santayana and others, but while those philosophical strands comprise a heritage for the modern movement, prewar conservatism was fundamentally different from today's brand. So it is necessary to begin with Buckley, who, upon graduating college, pilloried Yale University for its indoctrination in anti-theism and collectivism in a small, successful book, God and Man at Yale. His success allowed him to travel the college circuit, debating, writing, and making friends with loose bands of traditionalists (in both the Christian and Classical veins), libertarians, and anti-communists (who were often themselves ex-communists). In 1955, five years after graduating college, Buckley founded National Review, a magazine that quickly became the source of American conservatism's intellectual cohesion. National Review was not the voice of every conservative, but it was the most profound gathering place of contemporary conservative ideas. Not only was National Review a forum, but it had a political end. Buckley wanted to change the prevailing liberal policies, and to do that conservatives needed to influence people and win elections.
movement. Conservatives’ electoral message in 2008, ended on a populist chord with “Joe the Plumber” and “Joe Six-Pack” featured prominently. Many on the right were irked; David Brooks went as far as calling Sarah Palin “a fatal cancer” on the party. He went on to decry “a counter, more populist tradition [in conservatism], which is not only to scorn liberal ideas but to scorn ideas entirely.” Brooks’s sentiments are not at all new. Albert Jay Nock, an early libertarian who was a friend of Buckley’s father, wrote that the masses could never be saved from the impulse of collectivism. Instead, an elite, intelligent group, which he titled “The Remnant,” would play the role of libertarian prophet. The National Review’s first issue famously describes its role as “standing athwart history.” Conservatives have long seen themselves as “The Remnant” pressing against an overwhelming tide.

But some, like Willmoore Kendall, one of The National Review’s earliest writers, described themselves as “Appalachians-to-the-Rockies Patriots.” Kendall was born in rural Oklahoma to a blind preacher and detested the gilt “world of the Buckleys.” He was a political theorist who devoted his most vital works to The Federalist Papers and a theory of American constitutionalism. The American system, for Kendall, was based on “the deliberate sense of the whole community.” America’s role in the world was to demonstrate that self-government is possible. To this end, he saw government concessions to minority opinion as an obstacle. Minorities should “bide their time” until they can argue their case in front of public opinion. His majoritarianism reflected a belief that the people, although inarticulate, were virtuous keepers of the American tradition.

Bill Buckley is a synecdoche for the conservative movement’s cognitive dissonance. He once remarked he’d rather be governed by the first two thousand names in the phonebook than the first two thousand members of Harvard’s faculty. Yet, he celebrated ideas, spoke with a British rhythm, played the harpsichord, and loved his schooner. The conservative character is neither populist nor elitist, but a combustible mixture of both.

The Obama administration will likely unite the traditionalists, libertarians, and foreign policy hawks once again in opposition. The traditionalists and the libertarians are also in the midst of a feud over the ideology of conservatism. Both movements have evolved considerably since their early alliance. Traditionalists were once predominantly Catholics interested in “recovering Western traditional values.” Perhaps as a symptom of electoral success, the face of traditionalism has changed from Russell Kirk to Mike Huckabee, and is now considerably more Evangelical-Protestant in makeup. In May of 2008, Huckabee called libertarianism “a heartless, callous, soulless type of economic conservatism.” For Huckabee, not only is libertarianism bad policy: it chafes against Christian ethics. Kathleen Parker of the Washington Post, arguing for the opposing libertarian position, insisted that “[t]he evangelical, right-wing, oogedy-boogedy branch of the GOP is what ails the erstwhile conservative party and will continue to afflict and marginalize its constituents if reckoning doesn’t soon cometh.” Outrage over characterizing the belief in God as “oogedy-boogedy” and the free market as “soulless” burst into the blogosphere. Although it lacks the diplomacy of its predecessors, this traditionalist-libertarian feud is not new to conservatism.

The traditionalist belief in the authority of God and truth is not easily reconciled with the libertarian suspicion of authority’s impeding of free men. One man, Frank Meyer, also an early National Review contributor, devoted himself to “fusionism”—the intellectual fusion of both traditionalism and libertarianism. He criticized extreme traditionalism and the relativist impulses of libertarianism. He
did so with the favor of Bill Buckley, so the hard-line traditionalists and uncompromising libertarians who struck back at Meyer often found themselves alienated from the movement as a whole. Both the followers of Ayn Rand and those of Pat Buchanan were successfully marginalized. The content of Meyer’s fusion was more of a combination of traditionalism and libertarianism than a blend. In order for man to be virtuous, he reasoned, he must have the freedom to be vicious. Therefore, virtue requires freedom. In that vein, the ultimate political end was freedom and the ultimate individual end was virtue. Meyer understood that both strands can never be alloyed and can only co-exist in separate spheres of life.

L. Brent Bozell, Buckley’s brother-in-law, was one of Meyer’s staunchest critics. For Bozell, politics should, “establish temporal conditions conducive to human virtue—that is, to build a Christian civilization.” Bozell was no anti-libertarian either. He ghostwrote Barry Goldwater’s Consience of a Conservative and believed that freedoms should be adopted “as they are conducive to virtue.” But to Meyer, Bozell’s views of politics bordered on theocracy. In Meyer’s view, both freedom and virtue were fundamental. For most of the conservative movement, one or the other dominated.

In reality, the conservative cohesion came about as different ideological groups were simultaneously disillusioned with the guiding intellectual forces in Post-New Deal America. They were allied against the Left’s utopianism, suspicious of planning and centralized power, and fiercely opposed to communism; they never “fused.” It would make sense then, that, should conservatives reach success in their alloying issues, there would be no purpose for their cohesion. With the fall of the Soviet Union, progress toward New Federalism, and the success of welfare reform, many of the issues around which traditionalists, libertarians, and anti-communist hawks could unite have disappeared from the American scene. Likewise, since 1980, with Reagan, Gingrich, and both Bushes in seats of power, conservatives have had to govern and, in doing so, have had to emphasize parts of the coalition over others. Both of these are reasons to expect the fraying of conservatism.

But the Obama administration will likely unite the traditionalists, libertarians, and foreign policy hawks once again in opposition. Conservatives may at first have been drawn together in alliance by a common reaction, but they have since created an ideological heritage marked by a tense cohesion. Contemporary conservatives should not fear the tension. It is worth remarking on the electoral successes conservatives enjoyed after and during the past’s intellectual skirmishes. If today’s soul-searching can reach the intellectual pitch of the early National Review years, conservatives will benefit intellectually and electorally. In reflecting on this tension, conservatives should remember that their debates—about populism, religion, freedom, virtue—are not the stuff of a fleeting electoral crisis. The tension that so animates the movement will not dissipate, even if it is at its tautest now. ♦
There is too much worth reading, and nothing like enough time to read it. Forget that third novel by Nabokov, that second play by Stoppard, that collection of Chekhov’s; there are outstanding critics, thinkers and poets whose work we will never even discover, much less complete. The condition of someone who likes reading is one of desperation: we all go into the ground leaving behind shelves and shelves of unread masterpieces, each one brimming with inestimable worth and beauty, the paper-bound grave of some human heart.

With respect to literature we are all Newton on the seashore, picking up this or that pebble while the great ocean of unread books lies undiscovered, just past our fingertips.

As for the brief moments we have to pour lovingly into this or that book, they are assailed by the accoutrements of the information age. In the memorable formulation of one Lewis Lapham, of whom more presently, “Although we may wish it otherwise, none of us escapes the twenty-four hour siege of new and newer news. We’re smothered in the feathers of the stuff—on air, in print, online, as broadcast, podcast, broadsheet, and blog.” The eye of the media is myopic and relentlessly mercurial; it blinks towards Iran, Venezuela, or India and blinks away again without explanation or apology, never looking too closely or for too long. We hear about China in relation to our jobs and our economy, but we are told nothing of its civil institutions, its relationships with Russia and India, its plans in Tibet and Taiwan. Not until there’s a crisis, anyway. Even in areas of enduring coverage, namely our wars and our polity, you’d have to look elsewhere to find something like historical perspective—for instance, to locate the recent invasion in the history of foreign invasions of Afghanistan, or our transplanted democracy in the context of state building and Western interference in the Middle East. News pages are dominated by current events, the personalities of leaders, the scandals of the month, the most recent sliver of culture, and the meandering drip of developing stories. Media has gotten better and better at imparting information, but at the cost of producing a “ceaseless and insistent present that drives out all thought of what happened yesterday, last week, three months ago.” At the end of the day, what is it we’ve actually learned?

In the 1940s and ’50s University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins and professor Mortimer Adler, fearing the depreciation of history, bundled hundreds of classic texts into a fifty-four volume set under the inauspicious title The Great Books of the Western World. Adler topped it off with his Syntopicon, an index of the 102 Great Ideas coursing through their newly minted canon, beginning with “Angel,” “Animal,” “Aristocracy,” “Art,” “Astronomy,” and so on, to “Will,” “Wisdom,” “World,”

The Great Books were less than a rousing success. The Syntopicon (seven years, $1,000,000), which Adler envisioned as a new genre of reference work, treated great books as collections of some integral number of great ideas—arbitrarily, 102—which could then be indexed and looked up. The texts themselves were printed in large, unwieldy tomes filled with encyclopedia-sized type, two columns to a page, without explanatory footnotes or prefaces. Translations were taken from the public domain to save money, which often meant using editions from the nineteenth century, even when superior modern translations existed. Whole volumes were devoted to historically important but difficult and outdated scientific texts such as Fourier’s “Analytical Theory of Heat” and Faraday’s...
“Experimental Researches in Electricity.” The project ultimately cost two million dollars, and was a financial disaster until Britannica turned its marketing over to door-to-door encyclopedia salesmen. It is hard to imagine someone who would want to read the bulk of the thousands of pages of classic texts who was not also able to compose their own reading program, and pick editions in a translation and typeface of their choosing. The Great Books imagined a reader who was inspired and disciplined enough to read hundreds of the most important texts in Western intellectual history, but needed to be handed them in a single bound package, rather than simply a list.

Since this reader is indeed imaginary, Hutchins’s and Adler’s goal seemed more to enshrine these authors and their ideas in the protective armor of a reified canon than to provide resources for students; these books were designed to be seen, not heard. As contemporary reviewer Dwight Macdonald noted, “the problem is not placing these already available books in people’s hands but getting people to read them, and the hundred pounds of densely printed, poorly edited reading matter assembled by Drs. Adler and Hutchins is scarcely likely to do that.”

Enter Lewis Lapham, editor emeritus of Harper’s Magazine, who is publishing Lapham’s Quarterly in the space between these two unfortunate extremes. Using the same raw material as the Great Books and the same conception of unifying themes, Lapham seeks to counteract the pernicious influence of the “wind tunnel of our high-speed electronic media.” But his approach could not be more different from that of Hutchins and Adler. Where they produced a single unapproachable wall of print, Lapham sends out a meager two hundred pages a season, brightened with dozens of photographs and diagrams. He picks a single great theme per issue—thus far exploring War, Money, Nature, Education, Eros—and excerpts briefly from his sources. If you want the original, you can get the book yourself in a translation and edition of your choosing. Hutchins and Adler strove desperately for comprehensiveness, while Lapham is willing to omit Greats to a surprising degree: both Machiavelli and Clausewitz are absent from “States of War,” although his use of short selections paradoxically allows him to reach a far wider range of authors than the brutally trimmed Great Books. From the thesis of an amnesiac media and the antithesis of a ponderous, unreadable parade of tomes, Lapham synthesizes a sleek, artfully decorated volume of distilled thoughts on a single theme of contemporary and enduring significance.

Lapham’s Quarterly is beautiful, its white cover decorated with a single image: an abacus, a penny, the death mask of Agamemnon, the lipstick remains of a kiss. Lapham fills the interior with selections from literature, speeches, memos, poems, histories, eulogies, field reports and an abundance of colored charts, graphs, maps, paintings, and photographs. For all this, it’s remarkably easy to plunge in: most excerpts are only a page or two, and the country, century, and voice change so rapidly that the reader is continually overjoyed, horrified, or absorbed with chill and wonder. I read it front to back, like a book, but you could just as easily browse through it like a newspaper: excerpts are loosely grouped into chapters (e.g. “Calls to Arms,” “Field Reports,” “Postmortems”) but within each chapter there is no organizing principle than I can discern, except an attempt to mix up times and places. Lapham occasionally has moments of editorial inspiration: “States of War” opens with three proclamations on the eve of an invasion into Baghdad, taken from 2003, 1917, and 1095. The first quotation in “Eros” is from Casanova: “The best moment of love is when one is climbing the stairs.” And Foucault’s rejoinder, the reward for having clambered through the intervening two hundred pages, appears on the back cover: “The best moment of love is when the lover leaves in the taxi.” Because the quality is so consistently high, finding a representative sample is both very easy and very hard. Any twenty selections could stand in for the whole work, but anything less than a reproduction of the index is bound to leave dozens of worthwhile passages unmentioned. Nothing is included simply to fill space, and enormously painful cuts must have been required to bring it down to a mere eighty selections. Nonetheless, I will undertake the same task in miniature, selecting from Lapham’s selections.
Although he's not after comprehensiveness, the canon is still here in force: Achilles arms to avenge Patroclus, Henry V cries “Once more unto the breach,” the Athenian ambassadors deliver their ultimatum to Melos, Augustine struggles to reconcile war with scripture, Auden recasts the Shield of Achilles for the twentieth century, Orwell writes of the experience of being shot through the neck. Other speeches are likely only known to us by reputation: the three grievances of bin Laden's fatwa, or Wilson's call for the world to be made safe for democracy. Sometimes a familiar figure will speak unfamiliar words, as in transcripts of Nixon berating Kissinger for not “thinking big” enough to use nuclear weapons on North Vietnam, or in a 1932 correspondence between Freud and Einstein on the possibility of world peace.

And some of the entries are completely new. A CIA training manual for use in Guatemala weighs the benefits of assassination by blunt trauma, explosives, and falls of 75 feet or more, concluding that a fall is best and pedagogically noting that agents “may be presented brief outlines, with critical evaluations of the following assassination attempts: Archduke Francis Ferdinand, Ghandi, Harding, Hitler, Lincoln, Huey Long, Marat, Mussolini, Rasputin, Roosevelt, Trotsky, and Truman.” A memo from the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Cuba includes “Operation Good Times. Concept: Prepare a desired photograph, such as an obese Castro with two beauties in any situation desired, ostensibly within a room in the Castro residence, lavishly furnished, and a table brimming over with the most delectable Cuban food with an underlying caption (appropriately Cuban) such as, ‘My ration is different.’ Make as many prints as desired on sterile paper and then distribute over the countryside by air drops or agents.” Ferdinand Foch, Marshall of France in the first World War, notes that “It takes fifteen thousand casualties to train a major general.”

The images, far from being mere elegant decoration, add a great deal to the text, often serving as exclamation marks or ellipses at the end of an impassioned speech or indifferent recounting. The photographs are especially compelling: here is a five year old Albanian boy, struggling to hold his rifle aloft while a soldier tousles his hair. Somewhere in Baghdad, a wall sized photograph of Saddam Hussein grins at American soldiers blurred in the foreground. Above Dresden, a burnt statue gazes over the soft-edged ruins of a dead city. A still from Nevada shows a luminous pink-tinged mushroom against a jet black sky. In Crimea, stooped women and children sift through mud and corpses trying to identify the dead. The charts are fewer, but well chosen: in one, concentric circles show the effects of a one-megaton nuclear airburst—two miles away, all people killed, all buildings destroyed. Winds reach 470 mph. Seven miles away, many severely burned, all outdoors blinded, trees and buildings damaged. Winds reach 35 mph. And close to the beginning is Joseph Minard's superb map of Napoleon's march in and out of Russia, a fat beige rope representing an army of 600,000 flowing east until it strikes Moscow, horrifically diminished; then it becomes black and flows back, until the heartbreaking trickle stops next to the enormous bulk of the departing army. (For more on this remarkable graph, see Chapter 5 of Edward Tufte's Beautiful Evidence.)

“Eros” is composed along similar lines, albeit with less gore and more nudity. Gone are the placid reports from perpetrators of massacres in Rwanda, Poland, Vietnam, the New World. Images of men in order and the skeletons of cities are replaced with letters, stories, and essays on the joys and sorrows of love and lust. The usual suspects return: here is Humbert Humbert lauding his nymphets, Romeo calling to Juliet in her window, Casanova recounting a sublime conquest in Venice, Aristophanes describing the origin of love. But here is also a letter from Benjamin Franklin enumerating eight reasons to prefer older women (number five: “Because in every Animal that walks upright, the Deficiency of the Fluids that fill the Muscles appears first in the highest Part”); the Marquis De Sade explaining why sexual communism imbues republican virtues; David Foster Wallace reporting from the Adult Video News awards, concluding with a long list of industry suicides; James Baldwin, in dialogue with Casanova, describing the tragedy and self-loathing of a one night stand. And despite his editorial silence, Lapham's sense of humor shines through in places: from J. Edgar
Hoover he reproduces the following admonition: “I regret to say that we of the FBI are powerless to act in cases of oral-genital intimacy, unless it has in some way obstructed interstate commerce.”

For good measure, Lapham appends a handful of essays from contributors, loosely tying one or another past war or romance to our present circumstances. These are the weakest portion of the work, and they’re clearly meant as an afterthought, consuming less than a tenth of its pages. One thoughtful piece on the wane of non-sexual sensuality is offset by another that laboriously draws connections between America and Rome on the axes of “military corrosion, mass migration, and climate change,” and unironically criticizes experts who minimize the threat of a unified, expansionist Islamic caliphate throughout the Middle East. Part of the problem is that, whatever the quality of these pieces—which I fear is not very high—they have to appear after some of the best that’s been thought and said on the topic, and to go on about it for much longer. The contrast is grating, and the Quarterly would not be substantially diminished by cutting them altogether. By contrast, Lapham’s introductory essays are more enjoyable: he has a talent for setting the scene, weaving rich tapestries of allusions and images while unveiling his great theme. And he has a gift for wry humor, ending a list of imperial ventures in history with “Bush’s faith-based initiatives” and referencing the dead languages of television broadcast and better business management.

Finishing Lapham’s Quarterly feels much like finishing a great novel. The imagination is saturated with dozens stories and voices, which bubble up long after the last page is turned. Some of the most haunting sections come from unknown individuals: in one, a journalist in Honduras describes the mixture of external bravado and internal terror involved in covering a war zone. Another tells of German officers administering a reading comprehension test to Soviet POWs, informing them that those who pass will get work as clerks instead of laborers. The grinning literates are then led behind a shed to be shot. The range of exposure is enormous; it will be difficult to hear any call to arms without recalling its innumerable variations, their interchangeable tones of offended justice, noble evocation and stoic resolution; and then the inevitable, equally familiar tales of horror, unimaginable crimes and human deprivations in the accounts that will follow. The range of material makes it difficult to draw “lessons,” apart from the trivial: war is horrible and at least as natural as peace, although no one expects or prepares for it; sex, much of it outside of married heterosexual pairings, is omnipresent and fun to read about.

Lapham’s silence can be as enjoyable as his writing: as in his “Harper’s Index,” he simply presents his material to the reader, without direct analysis or commentary. His approach shares a great deal with Thucydides’ History: both author’s characters deliver impassioned, exquisitely constructed speeches on great themes in an editorial vacuum, and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions about which side is right, or even what each side is saying. A lecture to the Royal Military Academy on why art is only imaginable in a world routinely bloodied by war will be read as insightful or ridiculous depending on what a reader brings to it, or what voices speak before and after it.

“We are compelled to live with books,” says Strauss. “But life is too short to live with any but the greatest books.” This is one of them.
BEHIND “I CLAIM”: THE DIALECTICS OF WRITING

by Ji Xia

Writing at the University of Chicago begins with “I claim,” as I was told prior to my first philosophy paper assignment. Adding so simple a programmatic phrase as “I claim” in front of a sentence may seem trivial to many experienced writers, but for me it was an almost traumatic experience, affecting not only the writing and re-writing of my first college paper, but also my very conception of the writer: my innermost feelings about myself and my work when I write. And as the quarter went on, I learned that I wasn't the only one who didn't feel comfortable with the U of C style of argumentation; “I claim” sounded a bit too harsh to some other sensitive but timid minds as well. In order to resolve the trauma of explicit claim-making, I need to understand the philosophy behind “I claim” and the psychological discomfort the form of “I claim” triggers in a writer like myself—I invite all those who experience a sense of alienation in academic writing to think with me through the dialectics of writing.

The first time I spelled out “I claim” on my paper, I felt like a dictator and a butcher, dissecting the body of my own writing and destroying its soul meanwhile. Writing as objectification estranged me from myself and my work; in the finished object I felt not the expression but the repression and deprivation of myself, and my paper stood over against me as something alien and arbitrary, staring me down with an impersonal look, repelling me with a cold and pretentious tone.

In fact, I throw around claims all the time, subconsciously and habitually, in writing as well as in everyday bickering and chartering. So what caused the acute discomfort I felt when first asked to add programmatic language to my writing? Thinking back, the difference lies not so much in the content of argumentation as in the very form of the phrase “I claim,” which turns the inside out and makes the implicit explicit. Without “I claim,” I can talk about things without assuming full responsibility for my comments. The blissful casualness works even better when I write about other books, in which case I can simply blend in and flow with the language of other authors who are a lot smarter than me, poking around their arguments without standing on my own. However, “I claim” perforates this carefree bubble in order to single out the “I.” Meanwhile, this frightful and lonesome “I” not only learns the first lesson in responsibility and independence but also discovers the whole world of the “not I.”

Thus, when I first pronounced “I claim” explicitly, I was so anxious to defend my claims that I neurotically made up opponents in order to refute their arguments, real and imaginary, in the manner of a schizophrenic who constantly feels threatened and whose reality depends on fooling himself with phantoms. And since the “I” seemed to sound more distinctive in arguing against than in arguing for something, I had to suppress my admiration and seek disagreement where I didn't necessarily feel like disagreeing. For my first paper, the sacrifice of personal feeling and emotion for argumentative formality was manifest in that before I wrote the paper, I was full of pity and indignation for those who die; but after I finished re-writing the paper, all I cared about was that the Homeric characters should die matter-of-factly, and the sooner the better, because then I would be more quickly rid of the assignment along with Homer and his story.

Now that I’ve had my catharsis, my task is to trace the dialectics behind this “I claim.” But first, let’s read a little Hegel:

---

Ji Xia is a first-year in the College.
Language and labour are outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself per se, but lets the inner get right outside him, and surrenders it to something else...these outer expressions express the inner too much as that they do so too little. (340)

What I find most insightful in this remark is its “too much and too little.” Programmatic language creates at once an excess and a lack, and I consider this the major dilemma behind “I claim,” which haunts me when I write as my writing appears to myself at once presumptuous and inadequate. To begin, “I claim” sets up an opposition between the inner and the outer in the process of differentiation. When I make a claim explicitly, I assert the “I” by putting what is inside my head on paper after the leading term “I claim.” This outer expression expresses too much of the inner because instead of being a mix of my and a lot of other people’s opinions, it projects outwards, without reserve and without protection, as a singular “I” with a self-closed argument of its own—hence the independent thinker. On the other hand, the claim achieves too little because it has not yet attained universal acknowledgement; rather, the “I” now has to share the public sphere with other “I’s,” and the “I” thus exposed experiences a loss of wholeness due to the lack of self-efficacy among the “not I.”

This fear of misunderstanding often brings misery to the writer who desperately wishes to communicate something but finds no safe expression to convey to the reader the intended meanings and sentiments intact. And the more earnestly the writer approaches writing, the more difficult becomes the decision between to speak or not to speak, because a head shake from the reader means not just a failed argument but also a loss of self for the writer. To overcome such anxiety, the writer either distances himself from writing, making one claim after another without taking anything seriously, or the writer actively negates the threats of negation, adding such sidenotes as “I know you may not agree, but this is my opinion” and shutting out at once all dissenting voices. In the former case, “I claim” is turned into empty talk, a claim that conceals the lack of true claims, like a mask covering an expressionless face. In the latter, the silly tautology expresses nothing but the writer’s ego on the one hand and lack of confidence on the other. In acknowledging disagreements the writer really denies all criticisms; in defending a claim the writer really betrays its vulnerability. Both cases illustrate the dialectics of negation.

The student, when first asked to write in programmatic language, may complain about the loss of freedom and authenticity. The utterance “I have to write whatever the teacher wants in order to get the grades I want” negates not only the teacher as a hostile judge but also the self as a writer by degrading the value of writing to an alphabet. On the surface, such a student seems to be, to quote Hegel, the bondsman, while the teacher appears to be the lord. However, in speaking of bondage, the student is really trying to be the lord, and the bondsman’s complaints reveal the same desire of the lord to assert the self and negate the non-self. So it is not the loss of self but the overabundance of youthful ego that leads the student to complain about academic writing. The real ambition of that ego, the real motivation behind its seemingly helpless protests, is to set its own particular rules as universal and have everyone speak its own language.

A true bondsman accepts his bondage as a matter of fact because he recognizes and bows down to
his dependence on the lord, while a true lord enjoys such subjugation without scruples because he is able to fully assert his will and exercise his power of negation. The student writer, however, is caught between lordship and bondage, yearning for self-determination but lacking in self-reliance. Consequently, the student neither accepts the teacher’s rules easily nor enjoys the freedom of a willful writer, and the student says “I claim” without feeling sure of either the “I” or the claim. At this early stage, programmatic language indeed imposes a structure on the formerly characterless flow of thoughts, but the implicit feelings of the self are meanwhile sacrificed for the explicit skeleton of the “I.” Therefore, before the “I” grows and posits back its true content, “I claim” remains a form without conception—an empty identity term without a living personality to fill its formal void.

Essentially, the psychological discomfort triggered by “I claim” in an undisciplined writer like myself stems, philosophically speaking, from the negativity of the form of “I claim” in itself and the negative actions this form performs for itself. And the dialectics of writing discussed above—the alienating effects of “I claim”—consist mainly in the mediating movements of negation which accompany the maturing of a writer. At first, the writer mixes and flows with the current, expressing himself only implicitly without the urgency either to assert or to negate anything in particular, like the young child who instinctually clings to his parents without too much displeasure.

Then, the writer artificially differentiates the “I” from the “not I” by making his claims explicit, but this premature “I claim” stands as a mere form without content, an arbitrary imperative to determine the external world after the self and to cancel every seeming non-self, all without a real conception of the self. This stage resembles the teenager who is sick of rules but is still unable to renounce parental support: a burning desire to live on one’s own right meets the chilling reality of impotence, so that the teen chases after freedom without knowing what freedom really means. To

the teenage years belongs the mental development of the writer who feels uneasy about programmatic language in general and “I claim” in particular. Finally—at least this is what I hope for—the writer develops out of his own restless struggle a strong and coherent self that need not blush at the words “I claim” and becomes conscious of his freedom both formally and substantively, like the teenager who grows into a brave and responsible citizen, free and independent within his social existence.

My dialectics of writing shall, of course, conclude with the “negation of negation.” But the negation of negation in this case can mean a lot of different things depending on what you take to be the first negation. If the first negation signifies the artificial alienation of the self in academic writing, the negation of negation will be an organic reunion of the writer with his soul developed in writing. If the first negation signifies the exclusionary, protective closure of the self, the negation of negation will mean the opening up and enrichment of a more confident self. If the first negation signifies the hostile suspicion with which the student beholds the teacher, the negation of negation will build a liberal trust between the student and the teacher through mutual respect and appreciation for the intellect. Before the student writer achieves the self-consciousness of freedom, he madly attacks others’ arguments and marks the reader as an arbitrary judge whose disagreements or misunderstandings threaten to nullify his existence. The negation of this negativity will help the student to recognize the dynamic unity of student life and cultivate the ability to see different views and listen to different people without negating either the self or others, for every personality becomes a part of a versatile yet organic whole.

If the first negation signifies the initial feelings of emptiness and rigidity triggered by the strict form of argumentation which begins with “I claim,” the negation of negation will, I hope, lead to the infinite positing and unfolding of the richness behind “I claim.”

❧
If we were to look for a Jewish hero in American fiction crafted in profound complexity, we would begin with the novels of Saul Bellow (1915–2005), a grandfather of American-Jewish letters. Almost always his heroes are emphatically Jewish, bookish and agitated men who unburden themselves of their private troubles in witty, self-absorbed confessions. But their Jewish identities are often faint, a single part of a struggling self that contemplates the world’s alternatives. Tragic heroes cry out in despair to the gods, but Bellow’s heroes squabble with themselves.

Bellow’s protagonists reflect on Jewish identity, but ambivalently and through an assimilated lens. Bellow famously protested at being called a ‘Jewish writer’: “I find the label intellectually vulgar, unnecessarily parochializing, and utterly without value,” he said. “It avoids me both as a writer and a Jew.” Indeed, few fundamentally Jewish issues are at stake in his novels. The Jewish intellectual community is understandably confused about Saul Bellow.

It is absurd to measure whether or not Bellow’s fiction is “Jewish” by counting Yiddish proverbs or synagogues or by questioning his connection to Judaism. Bellow was of course Jewish, but what is most interesting is that this heritage is not addressed as a complex world of experience, but a context for self-examination in the modern world. Bellow was “an American, a Jew, a writer by trade,” whose main concern was examining modern psychology, creating a distinctively new American style, and revitalizing the novel of ideas. Bellow took Judaism as a source of inspiration, and almost incidentally made it a normal part of the American literary tradition.

Philip Roth writes that Jewish identity is just the “bare bones” of Bellow’s novels. Bellow might have been “a source of pride or comfort (or at least has been little or no trouble, which can amount to the same thing)” to American Jewry, yet his novels are “too deliberately ambiguous, too self-challenging, too densely rendered and reflective to be the vehicles of ethnic propaganda or comfort.”

James Atlas, who spent nearly a decade on Saul Bellow, A Biography, writes that Judaism, while integral, is not the foundation of Bellow’s work: “It wasn’t the Talmud he had read in the public library as a boy, he often said: It was the classics of Western literature.” Bellow is right to be mysterious and elusive with Jewish matters. Philip Roth seems a better example of a “Jewish writer” in the American literary tradition, whose work asks what it means to be a Jew in the modern world and explores the effect of Jewish culture on the imagination. Bellow, however, is writing about Americans.

Saul Bellow, born in Quebec to Russian immigrants two years after their arrival, spent a great deal of his life in Chicago: “When people ask whether I have roots here I say that tangled wires would be more like it.” He was at student at the University of Chicago, and after living in New York he came back to Hyde Park in 1962 to teach at the Committee on Social Thought, where he stayed for over 30 years. The city is prominent in Bellow’s work, shaping his heroes’ experiences through its tumultuousness, luxury or urban decay, forcing them to look inwards and confront
aspects of themselves.

*Seize the Day* (1956) is brilliant and compact. It evokes the tension between the American drive for success and the need for a fulfilled inner life, echoing the Jewish folk tales about miserable fools. Tommy Wilhelm, rejected by his elderly, rich father while his wife demands alimony and refuses divorce, is suffocating. Choked up with feelings and congested thoughts, he is desperate for extra money and a new start, but anticipates a crisis. Drawn in his anxiety by “peculiar flavor of fatality,” he expects disaster.

Everyone around him in his New York City apartment is successful, yet he remains depressed, fearful of a “huge trouble long presaged but till now formless.” We are forced to ask: what exactly is wrong with him that he expects a breakdown? It revolves in part around his failure to amass wealth, while his father, the pampered Dr. Adler, dubs his son a sentimental slob. The old man thinks himself a realization of the self-made American man, and though he lives in the same hotel as his son, he refuses to help and casts a disapproving eye. Wilhelm is living in his father’s image of him, and is incapacitated.

Tommy Wilhelm could “cast off his father’s name” but not opinion—he was born Wilhelm Adler—creating a tension that subdues his more vital, “feminine” quality: “From his mother he had gotten sensitive feelings, a soft heart, a brooding tendency to be confused under pressure.” Wilhelm is alienated from either aspect of his self, and cannot rid himself of his father’s God-like voice, internalized as conscience:

> The changed name was a mistake, and he would admit it as freely as you liked. But this mistake couldn’t be undone now, so why must his father continually remind him how he had sinned?

So destructive is this self-judgment that all possibilities seem bleak. Wilhelm even suspects that his suffering is meaningful in itself: “Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life and the essence of his being here.”

Seemingly plucked from Yiddish folklore, the hypnotic, philosophizing con man, Dr. Tamkin, arrives to present Wilhelm with a successful version of himself, urging Wilhelm to “seize the day.” And Wilhelm does, by blindly entrusting Tamkin with his remaining money.

A burlesque of the compassionate father that Wilhelm seeks, Tamkin is worldly and engaging. He claims a number of occupations: former psychiatrist to the Egyptian royal family, an authority on the criminal underworld, a cotton investor, a Kodak researcher and is even fluent in Greek. He also designed an unsinkable ship. We’re prompted to ask, as critic Alfred Kazin writes, “Who is to say what Tamkin is, where he begins, who he is, what he believes?”

Tamkin is spectacular. Wilhelm is suspicious of this sly magician, but is pulled in by his own desperation. Tamkin, spouting what sounds like Emerson, is irresistible simply because he urges Wilhelm to engage with his emotions, which starts a wild process of self-discovery:

> There’s a lot of souls. But there are two main ones, the real soul and a pretender soul. Now! Every man realizes that he has to love something or somebody. He feels that he must go outward. ‘If thou canst not love, what art thou?’ Are you with me? … ‘What art thou?’ Nothing. That’s the answer. Nothing. In the heart of hearts—Nothing! So of course you can’t stand that and want to be Something, and you try.

Tamkin speaks seductively, but he cannot tell Wilhelm what he needs to know. It is up to Wilhelm to uncover the vital aspects of his personality. Tamkin is a liar, but it does not stop him from helping Wilhelm cast off his own anxieties—his guilt over his failure, need for security, self-pity, and so on.
The theme of spiritual renewal resonates with Jewish tradition—Wilhelm thinks to himself, “In Dad’s eyes I am the wrong kind of Jew….Whatever you are, it always turns out to be the wrong kind”—but Jewishness always seems secondary to the dialogue with Western thinkers and literary styles. We can compare Tamkin to stock characters from Jewish folktales: the wiley beggar, the absent-minded “luftmensch,” or the imitators of the “tzaddik,” the wise sage, but Tamkin is not an archetype. He is a false guide, and he probably exists. Tamkin takes control of Wilhelm’s money with a legal document. Unlike the comical Yiddish tales, it is not funny when Wilhelm is nauseous, fearing he has lost everything, and maddeningly searches for Tamkin, only to intrude upon a stranger in the bathroom.

For Bellow, only in wrestling with oneself can there be a novel of ideas. He invokes Joseph Conrad’s theory of art in his 1976 Nobel lecture, criticizing the contemporary literary interest in “elevated analytical, moral or sociological” works that underestimate the crafting of characters:

-I myself am tired of obsolete notions and of mummies of all kinds but I never tire of reading the master novelists. And what is one to do about the characters in their books? Is it necessary to discontinue the investigation of character? …I suggest that it is not in the intrinsic interest of human beings but in these ideas and accounts that the problem lies. The staleness, the inadequacy of these repels us. To find the source of trouble we must look into our own heads.

Avoiding the hardboiled tradition of Hemingway, Bellow focuses on the immense pressures of private life, the “dubious selves” within his characters that confront contradictions and alternatives and are then forced to confront the public American world.

Gore Vidal wrote in 1980: “Today’s Serious Novel is not well lit.” His point was that the “Serious Novel” is published and praised, but with no one caring to read it—and what else is a novel for? “The interpreter-theorist will replace the creator as culture hero,” writes Vidal, while the real world proves to be less ambitious: “you take the elevator to the mezzanine, and turn left; you can’t miss it—what sort of novels are still read, voluntarily, by people who will not be graded on what they have read?”

Bellow’s writing is serious while mocking the too-serious, and is always pleasurable, helping to fill the gap that Vidal exposes. With the introspective flavor of the great Russian novelists, Bellow examines questions of knowledge and belief about the self in a dialect of the America near-at-hand, with characters that are familiar because they are cluttered and confused. Bellow wants you to think, and he entertains.

Caricatures and comedy abound, but what is striking is Bellow is writing about real people. His work is brimming with observed city life and its psychological crises, constantly after a distinctive voice that gives us real impressions of a modern, urban world. There is an excellent moment when Wilhelm observes a man smoking:

-A long perfect ash formed on the end of the cigar, the white ghost of the leaf with all its veins and its fainter pungency. It was ignored, in its beauty, by the old man. For it was beautiful. Wilhelm he ignored as well.

Bellow writes in the tradition of James Joyce and not Sholem Aleichem. Involving his readers completely in the minds of his characters, Bellow fashions himself as new literary stylist, writing of the emotional pressures of American as Joyce wrote about Ireland. There is no better example than Bellow’s sixth novel, Herzog (1964), with its deeply personal and inventive flourishes.
Moses Herzog, a Chicago professor, is in anguish when his second wife, Mady, leaves him for his own friend. The book has no plot, but the baffled and alienated Herzog feels intense: “He had fallen under a spell and was writing letters to everyone under the sun,” with an irresistible need “to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends.”

The letters are teeming with ideas, turning Herzog’s personal crisis into a crisis of modern thought. He writes “endlessly, fantastically, to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives, and at last to the dead, his own obscure dead and finally the famous dead.”

There is nothing like the letters that Herzog writes. They show us his mind, aggressive and churning. The writer is ironic, often at his own expense, and intolerant of the modern world. Though Herzog himself is meager and colorless, the prose twists and plays, bringing him to life in the reader’s imagination. He is endlessly writing, rarely finishing, and never sending his letters. They are a blend of erudition, emotion, and nonsense:

Dear Mama, as to why I haven’t visited your grave in so long…Dear Wanda, Dear Zinka, Dear Libbie, Dear Ramona, Dear Sono, I need help in the worst way. I am afraid of falling apart. Dear Edvig, the facts is that madness also has been denied me. I don’t know why I should write to you at all. Dear Mr. President, Internal Revenue regulations will turn us into a nation of bookkeepers. The life of every citizen is becoming a business. This, it seems to me, is one of the worst interpretation of the meaning of human life history has ever seen. Man’s life is not a business.

Herzog’s piercing mind leaps from one idea to the next. Like Leopold Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*—it takes a writer beyond remarkable to tell Bloom’s non-story—Herzog’s mind is fully a part of him, making the text engaging and pleasurable.

Even with the betrayal, humiliation and madness, the novel is actually lively. Bellow’s reflections are comic, and keep our distance from Herzog. When he reflects on his uneasy relationship with Mady, who is many years his junior, we laugh as we feel for him:

She wanted him there at night…But in the morning she would have liked him to disappear. And he was not used to this; he was used to being a favorite. But he was dealing with a new female generation, that was what he told himself. To her he was a fatherly, graying, patient seducer (he could not believe it!). But the parts had been distributed.

If Herzog’s paranoia is lost on us, the American scene is vivid. Herzog is perhaps not completely exposed, but New York and Chicago are. Bellow has a genius for place, breathing it in from minute to minute. Herzog and others move from street to street in vacuous solitude. Grasping the essences of city life, Bellow’s city it is not an agitated whole, but is continually askance. Traveling in the subway Herzog evokes the dream figure of a Dr. Schrödinger at Times Square, and thinks to himself:

It has been suggested (and why not) that reluctance to cause pain is actually an extreme form, a delicious form of sensuality and that we increase the luxuries of pain by the injection of a moral pathos. Thus working both sides of the street. Nevertheless, there are moral realities, Herzog assured the entire world as he held his strap in the speeding car.

Herzog’s dejected mind is pulled by two contrary forces: the breakdown of the public world and the mess of his private life. It’s unclear in which world he lives. He is absurd but seems composed; he is self-absorb, yet he is raw. Echoing the turmoil of Dostoevsky’s tense heroes, Bellow’s Russian inheritance acquires an American bounce.

Bellow gives America a modern voice that rattles us and affirms that we’re not through with serious novels and characters. Bellow tells us in his Nobel lecture that we can drop our interest in the American character, but it is “nonsense to do it on the theoretical ground that the period which marked the apogee of the individual, and so on, has ended.” We *have* to find these characters, and “if we fail to represent them, the fault is ours.”

The hero of Bellow’s third novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, gives us an off-beat confessional crammed with allusions to Homer, Virgil, and Shakespeare, hefty in learning and rhapsodic in style. Augie declares: “I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way.” Augie does some heavy reading and exploring and questions
his exposure to the luxury of “American dream.” He is an idealist who, even when isolated in Chicago, knows that there must be more to life and to America, and fills his prosaic world with heroic and philosophic thoughts. Augie is much like Belldow himself, who is constantly searching for the essence of our condition in full complexity and confusion, revealing and concealing glimpses of the painful and the playful.

Augie, never quite able to adapt to the world yet always thinking about it, dubs himself “a sort of Columbus of the near-at-hand,” and thinks that though Columbus must have “thought he was a flop…when they sent him back in chains,” it “didn’t prove there was no America.” Augie is not a flop, and his narrative interprets the chaos of his life and gives it meaning. He’s better equipped than he knows.

Bellow, like Augie, looks for the intermittent true impressions of American life. He connects real existential intensity to the public world. His characters engaged in the wrenching world of alternatives and his descriptive passages evoke with clarity and mystery the brimming city life of the twentieth century. Always thinking in terms of the modern self, Bellow is for us a sort of Columbus of the near-at-hand.
February 23, 2007

I used to think that Kafka’s wonderful story “Hunger Artist” revealed the tragic crushing of high art by the creeping glacier of entertainment. After all, its poor artist was displaced from his solo stage in the center of town to a sideshow in the circus where, finally, unwatched by anyone, he starved not to perfection but to miserable death. Now, following the apotheosis of the one-time Texas beauty turned ludicrous fortune-hunter and, finally, burned-out addict, Anna Nicole Smith—her ‘true’ name a more humble Texas moniker—I read “Hunger Artist” in a new way. The need of a country like the post-Marshall Plan United States for tragi-farce is enormous. To confront nothing but the savagery, corruption, selfishness, vulgarity, or sheer murderousness of so many of our greatest public and private enterprises would plunge most of us into stupefaction or neurotic collapse. Somehow or other, when confrontation with Middle Eastern bloodiness, African starvation, disease and organized murder, or the American chasm between haves and have-nots becomes too much to take, our wonderful media throw up on the shore of the national consciousness an Anna Nicole Smith, a Britney Spears, an Elian Gonzales, and around each of these narrate an intrigue peopled by the usually invisible *dramatis personae* who make up most of our population. Which of us could have come up with Anna’s mother Virgie, the plump, peroxided grieving *mater dolorosa* who hadn’t seen her addled daughter in ten years, or the parade of Anna’s pimps and lovers, or the Kentucky photographer-reporter, or the worshipful parasite-lawyer, or the vasectomied Carolina land baron? Who could have conjured up the Bronx-born cabbie turned lawyer, turned judge, spewing the caramelized gunk of his half-baked sentimentality and illiteracy over his courtroom as if touched with the divinity of a mad Narcissus? How wonderful that millions and millions of us could convert revulsion into a sort of laughter as these marvelous humans quarreled about the final resting place of the “remains” of the poor Texas floozie who in death achieved the celebrity she’d so long pursued? We didn’t need to think about eighteen-year-old boys learning how to walk with their new mechanical legs in hospital room-battlegrounds (roaches fighting rats), didn’t need to see five year old Iraqi children bleeding to death in their parents’ arms, didn’t have to contemplate American sages extrapolating medieval emptiness from the latest observation of the nine hundred and women campaigning for the American presidency. We were, for a few hours at least, saved. You would have understood, Franz, *nicht wahr*?, the latest sentences from the presidential campaigners, all five hundred of them. Franz K. would have understood, *nicht wahr*?

March 7, 2007

Hard to think that an American jury would convict a well-spoken, clean-featured, polite little fellow called “Scooter.” Who next, Tom Sawyer?

Sure enough, a juror, minutes after the verdicts were handed over, said the jurors liked Scooter and wondered why it was he, rather than, say, Karl Rove, in the courtroom. Little Scooter looked to them like “a fall guy.”

As they were arriving at their logically imperative verdict, Jean Baudrillard, one of the most famous “postmodern gurus,” died in Paris, age 77. For M. Baudrillard, “l’affaire Libby” would have been another “simulacrum,” an event or series of events so
thick with reports about itself that any underlying actuality would have been displaced. For him, after all, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place (the wonderful title taken from Jean Giradoux’s play, La guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu); it was a sequence of violent, “hyperreal” events which simulated the old, genuine wars of cause, purpose, clear beginnings and conclusions. Scooter, a man of letters, might well yesterday have felt himself in what Baudrillard called “a desert of the real.”

Eleven years earlier, he’d published a novel, The Apprentice, about a group of Japanese caught in a 1903 blizzard during a smallpox epidemic. (Libby had once been so insistent about universal vaccination that his friends called him “Germ Boy.”) Its blurb talks of the novel’s “bestiality and pedophilia” and boasts that it is “packed with sexual perversion, dwelling on prepubescent girls and their training as prostitutes.” Some of its unhappy readers were disgusted by scenes of bears “coupling” with these little girls. (One reader suggested that when Bush pardons Scooter for his indicted crimes that he include his crime against literature.) Although no reader wondered if the novel were autobiographical, I wonder now if such a sanguinary imagination might have something to do with the ease of concocting bloody wars fought by others.

Irve Lewis Libby was known as Scooter after his investment banker father noticed him scurrying around the cradle. His later moves took him through Andover, Yale and Columbia Law School, a much smoother career than that of his old companion in simulacra arms, Dick Cheney. (Scooter graduated magna cum laude from Yale; Cheney was thrown out of it.) It was in New Haven that Scooter came under the influence of one of his professors, Paul Wolfowitz, who would later draw him from prosperous legal work—Marc Rich, Clinton’s notorious pardonee, was one of his clients—first to the State and then to the Defense Department. There, with Wolfowitz, Feith and Cheney, Scooter helped work up plans for the democratic transformation of the Middle East and the recreation of what Arthur Schlesinger Jr., another of last week’s losses, decried as the imperial presidency.

Baudrillard delighted in a story by Jorge Luis Borges about the huge map of an empire which continued to decay as the map became larger and larger, soon displacing the empire it originally charted. With the conviction of the first of this band of simulacra brothers—Scooter was known as “Cheney’s Cheney”—one wonders if the tattered record of their grandiose plans will be what survives the chaos and destruction those plans engineered.

March 20, 2007

To Joshua Speed, a friend who marveled at Lincoln’s memory, Lincoln said, “You’re mistaken—I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I’ve learned—my mind is like a piece of steel, very hard to scratch any thing on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out.” This reader sometimes forgets page 231 when he’s on page 235.

To assay the experience of presidential candidates is not a simple matter of calculating the number of
years in this job or that one, the length or frequency of their marriages, the number or distinction of their academic degrees. These are important and should be known and considered, but my guess, say, is that Barack Obama’s boyhood years in an Indonesian school might be the equivalent of years of anthropological or ambassadorial presence in Jakarta, that his years at the racially mixed private school in Hawaii count for understanding of racial peace and strife as much or more than five years work at the NAACP, that his years of community work on Chicago’s South Side, his subsequent terms in the Illinois and United States Senate, his lecturing at the U. of Chicago Law School close to such men as Cass Sunstein, Richard Posner, Douglas Baird and Richard Epstein have taught him more about dealing with varieties of intellect than a dozen years of diplomatic intercourse in the capitals of Europe, Asia and Africa.

I cannot gauge his patience, tolerance, equanimity or charm (although my one encounter with him at a south side block party brought evidence of easy humor), but he has already met tests for these in his weeks of campaigning. As for administrative experience, he has far less than George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and several thousand (hundred thousand?) other people, but isn’t this deficiency at least partly negated by contemplation of the works of these experienced gentlemen.

I don’t intend these remarks to be an endorsement of Obama. I may well neither vote nor get a chance to vote for him in 2008. The intention here is to vault the hurdle of his inexperience.

March 21, 2007

The New York Times, Baghdad, March 20 — Insurgents detonated a bomb in a car with two children in it after using the children as decoys to get through a military checkpoint in Baghdad, an American general said Tuesday. Speaking at a news briefing at the Pentagon, Maj. Gen. Michael Barbaro, deputy director for regional operations at the Joint Staff, said American soldiers had stopped the car at the checkpoint but had allowed it to pass after seeing the two children in the back seat. “Children in the back seat lower suspicion,” he said, according to a transcript. “We let it move through. They parked the vehicle. The adults run out and detonate it with the children in back.”

Every day we think it can’t get worse. Last week, it was blasted American soldiers, their head wounds and traumas unrecognized, discharged from brilliant initial treatment to the inertia and carelessness of paperwork, the discomfort and filth of halfway houses. This week, George Packer’s “Betrayal” (The New Yorker, March 27, 2007), tells of the abandonment of brave, America-loving Iraqi interpreters, hunted down, tortured and killed by their Iraqi neighbors for betrayal and now ignored, abandoned and betrayed by the American authorities for whom they were indispensable, although too often Cassandra’d into uselessness.

And always threats, bombs, torture, beheadings, bodies on garbage heaps eaten by dogs, explosions at weddings, in markets, schools, mosques, networks devouring, recording, broadcasting the views and sounds of burning and exploded flesh, anguish, mourning, desolation, despair.

Like sufferers from incurable, agonizing cancers, like addicts in the filth, stench, helpless hatred of self, parents, the world and all in it, we, in some-
what discomforted contemplation, say, “It can’t get worse.”

“Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill,” said mad old King Lear. “All’s cheerless, dark and deadly,” said his faithful Kent; and Cordelia, young historian of catastrophe, added, “We are not the first/Who with best means, have endured the worst.”

But the Lear line that comes to mind as I try to imagine the two children blown up in the suicide car—what age? whose were they? what did they think? what did their parents and grandparents think?—is from Edgar:

“The worst is not/So long as we can say, ‘This is the worst.’”

March 29, 2007

Three years ago, my wife and I spent about five weeks in Hyderabad, Andra Pradesh, lecturing on English and American literature to the well-trained students of Osmania University. After ten days of some discomfort at the lodge adjacent to the excellent American Studies Library, we lived in a good hotel and commuted by taxi or by the chauffeur-driven car of the head of the department. How much of the town we saw is hard to know, but we did go around a good deal and saw, heard and smelled enough to fill our minds for quite a while. Among the thousands of things we didn’t see—or, until the Lehrer News report a couple of nights ago, know anything about—was the existence there of 17 transition home-schools for 5000 young girls brutalized into the world of childhood prostitution. These schools, called “eternal flames” or Prajwala, were founded and are run by a heroic and brilliant 34-year-old woman, Dr. Sunitha Krishnan, who herself had been raped at fifteen and beaten many times before and since.

By chance, I’d just read a story by Hemingway called “The Denunciation,” which celebrates in his inimitable way a very different sort of heroism and gallantry. Its center is the wonderful Madrid bar Chicote, which for years served martinis made with the finest yellow gin, and whose waiters were famously cheerful, friendly and helpful. The time is 1938, and, to the astonishment of the narrator, into the bar walks one of its former patrons, now a flyer for Franco. The narrator recalls what a wonderful pigeon shot the man was and the day that despite his own poor shooting, he won every peseta the man had. The man was a wonderful sport. That he should now come into this bar where waiters have lost sons to the Franco forces amazes him. A waiter tells the narrator he wishes to denounce the man to the Seguridad. The narrator gives him the number of a friend there, and when the man leaves the bar, the agents are already driving up to effect the capture. He asks himself why the old pigeon shooter returned to Chicote’s and decides that he just couldn’t imagine coming to Madrid without coming to this best of all bars.

The narrator calls his friend at Seguridad and asks him to tell the man that he, the narrator, denounced him. He does not want him to go to his death thinking poorly of Chicote’s waiters.

Hemingway’s notions of gallantry and heroism have not entirely disappeared. The sexual hierarchy which was an unspoken ingredient of them still exists. The savaged, tyrannized eight- and ten-year-old girls in the Prajwala schools can be seen as its ugliest extrapolation. I myself know several brilliant and charming septuagenarians whose vitality can only be sustained or renewed by women forty and fifty years their junior. For almost forty years, I myself have lived happily with a woman more than twenty years younger than I am. I am not going to pin a medal on my chest nor do more than joke with my friends about their latest conquest, but I am delighted that more and more thinking and caring people realize the authentic gallantry, heroism and grandeur of such people as Dr. Sunitha Krishnan.
It is very possible that every student about to begin his or her studies in biblical criticism should read John Barton’s *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. I surely wish that I had. Barton argues with conviction and concision, and as a primer to biblical criticism, his book strikes me as wildly successful. Barton’s aim appears to be twofold: to discern the essence of biblical criticism, but at the same time to defend the dignity and future of biblical criticism against attacks from within and outside of the academy, by showing that new literary approaches in biblical studies are not so radical a departure from traditional biblical criticism as is often believed, and that biblical criticism has suffered at the hands of negative and inaccurate caricature.

Barton is successful in perspicuously presenting what might plausibly be said to constitute the defining principles of biblical criticism: (a) semantic inquiry that reads phrases and words in their historical-linguistic context, (b) macro-semantic sensitivity to questions of genre and the relationship of form-types to meaning of texts, and (c) the conscious decision to approach the meaning of text prior to the evaluation of its truth-content. Still, the deeper question is whether his description and defense of biblical criticism lives up to his claim that biblical criticism approaches the text “on its own terms” and satisfactorily meets his own definition of the critical enterprise, that “only when we have seen [the texts] in their own light can we begin to use them to answer ours” (164, 179).

From the outset, Barton argues that the critical

---

*The Nature of Biblical Criticism*  
*by John Barton*  
*Westminster John Knox Press, 206 pp., $24.95*

It is very possible that every student about to begin his or her studies in biblical criticism should read John Barton’s *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. I surely wish that I had. Barton argues with conviction and concision, and as a primer to biblical criticism, his book strikes me as wildly successful. Barton’s aim appears to be twofold: to discern the essence of biblical criticism, but at the same time to defend the dignity and future of biblical criticism against attacks from within and outside of the academy, by showing that new literary approaches in biblical studies are not so radical a departure from traditional biblical criticism as is often believed, and that biblical criticism has suffered at the hands of negative and inaccurate caricature.

Barton is successful in perspicuously presenting what might plausibly be said to constitute the defining principles of biblical criticism: (a) semantic inquiry that reads phrases and words in their historical-linguistic context, (b) macro-semantic sensitivity to questions of genre and the relationship of form-types to meaning of texts, and (c) the conscious decision to approach the meaning of text prior to the evaluation of its truth-content. Still, the deeper question is whether his description and defense of biblical criticism lives up to his claim that biblical criticism approaches the text “on its own terms” and satisfactorily meets his own definition of the critical enterprise, that “only when we have seen [the texts] in their own light can we begin to use them to answer ours” (164, 179).

From the outset, Barton argues that the critical

---

*by Aaron B. Roberts*

*Geist* of biblical criticism derives not only from the awareness of difficulties within the text, but crucially from the awareness that attempts to harmonize these difficulties with one another results in an overly strained reading. Accordingly, he maintains that it is misleading to call the dominant mode of biblical studies “the Historical Critical method”; a more appropriate label would be “biblical criticism,” because biblical criticism is largely literary in character, scientific only in the German sense of being “intellectually rigorous” (66), and interested in historical questions only accidentally.

Following upon his essentially literary understanding of the interpretive enterprise, Barton argues that biblical criticism is fundamentally concerned with the “plain sense” of the text, which he pursues first by negative demonstration; he clarifies what biblical criticism is *not*, or at least what it is not “essentially.” Barton’s advocacy of a “plain sense” reading is, well, plainly sensible, and it is probably a good description of what biblical criticism does. Most crucially, Barton’s plain sense reading permits the reader to attend to an allegorical reading when it is clearly the reading intended by the author. Barton quite sensibly avoids direct confrontation with post-structuralism, whose dogmatic insistence on the almost infinite polyvalency of texts results in a sort of “critical nihilism, in which communication between people is impossible” (87). Instead, he quotes Umberto Eco: “I accept the statement that a text can have many senses. I refuse the statement that a text can have any sense…. It is not true that everything goes” (114).

Chapter Five briefly sketches the history or intellectual pedigree of biblical criticism, which he, along with others, primarily locates both in the Enlightenment project and in the Reformation movement. However, he also proposes that salient features of the critical spirit can be seen in unexpected pre-Enlightenment contexts (e.g.,

---

*Aaron B. Roberts is a fourth-year in the College, majoring in Fundamentals and Political Science.*
Chapter Six consists of a response to the two-front attack on biblical criticism that I noted above. In surveying “post-critical” critics of biblical criticism, Barton reaffirms the non-confessional character of biblical criticism, although he acknowledges that its practitioners generally hold some sort of religious commitment. In addition, he asserts the third principle of the critical enterprise, which I have already mentioned above: the alleged necessity of bracketing truth evaluations in reading until meaning is obtained.

I can hardly engage Barton in the fashion that his very learned and articulate exposition requires. Instead, I can ask some questions and pose some potential problems for his presentation and for biblical criticism in general. Although my critique may appear sympathetic to what Barton calls the “non-critical” or “biblical conservative” type of scholarship, I am nevertheless a Wertfrei reader, value-neutral, at least with respect to religious belief. Because I have never once assumed or believed that the Bible is correct in its claims, I cannot be dismissed as a religious “conservative” or “fundamentalist Bible reader,” as Barton is often inclined to do.

The most edifying part of Barton’s book is his attempt to distinguish what he calls the holistic, harmonizing reading of the Bible from critical readings. This distinction is the thread that runs through the entire argument. This feature of Barton’s presentation is edifying not necessarily because Barton has placed the distinction beyond the shadow of a doubt, but because it reveals the way in which, I assume, many biblical critics understand their approach to differ from non-secular approaches of the past. Barton alleges that those who seek to harmonize books of the Bible approach it in a “piecemeal way” like “lawyers adding up evidence from many sources to make a case” (19, 24). But what else, I am inclined to ask, is the net effect of source criticism, particularly in the context of contemporary critical study of the Pentateuch as a whole?

Although Barton does disavow source criticism and redaction studies as a defining mark of biblical criticism, because this type of study is one of the most palpable and substantial effects of biblical criticism as it exists today, it would be appropriate to hone in on this element, especially when reviewing a work that, arguably, seeks to defend biblical criticism, albeit by means of clarifying its essential character. The most pressing question that arises is whether or not a critical—that is, intellectually rigorous—reading of the Bible requires, of absolute necessity, the kind of source criticism that is present throughout much of critical literature. (However, it is well noted, by Barton, that not all of biblical criticism involves source criticism, e.g., the study of Job.)

The first point to raise in response to Barton concerns the interpretation of other ancient texts. On Barton’s account, biblical criticism eschews holistic readings in the Pentateuch, because, as he claims, “it makes little sense, unless one is prepared to set up literary conventions very different from those within which modern readers normally approach texts…. If you are used to reading postmodernist writing, then the collected works of Moses may well seem rather unified. But if your previous experience is in reading Thucydides or Livy, you can hardly fail to notice certain awkwardnesses
in the Pentateuch” that require something akin to the four-source hypothesis (42). It is remarkable that Barton should mention Thucydides here, for one of the most infamous alleged textual contradictions in classical Greek occurs very early in Thucydides’ History, and classicists will never cease to debate the matter. In the prolegomena to his work, Thucydides gives an account of the principles of his historiography, two of which seem at variance with one another. He appears to claim simultaneously (a) that he records speeches according to what seemed to him to have been required by the situation, and (b) that he records what was actually said (Historiae, 1.22.1 l. 4-1.22.2 l. 1). In drawing attention to Thucydides, I am not proposing that it is impossible to make sense of this apparent contradiction, but I am proposing that resolution of apparent textual contradiction does not of necessity mandate that we consider the possibility of textual corruption (lower criticism) or infer that multiple, conflicting sources stand behind Thucydides’ own writing (higher criticism). On the other hand, I do concede that this passage from Thucydides represents an apparent conflict that is methodological and philosophical in nature, and not the factual-historical type of apparent contradiction that we see often in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, it would not be altogether difficult to produce a handful of examples of this type of apparent contradiction in, say, the writings of Xenophon, though Barton does not mention him.

Much ado is made about genre in biblical criticism. Throughout the work, Barton is intimately concerned with questions of genre, awareness of which represents for him “the basic critical perception” (23). However, his own conception of literary analysis, and especially genre, might serve as a double-edged sword for his own argument and for biblical criticism in general. Genre, for Barton, is the central consideration for literary theory. According to him, it is primarily because biblical criticism has “a clear sense of how the telling of a story works” that the harmonistic approach to the Bible has rejected: “Critical readers have in their minds an idea of what makes for coherence in a literary work and quickly observe that such coherence is not present in many biblical texts” (19, 24). However, we must ask whether the categories currently in use do justice, so to speak, to these particular texts which they serve to illuminate.

If we are to interpret the Bible “on its own terms,” should we not respect its own textual self-understanding?

Barton claims that biblical criticism was inaugurated by the desire to understand, and that alleged problems in the text frustrate understanding. So, as Barton claims, “difficulties” within the text (e.g., “internal inconsistencies”) lead to source theories such as Welhausen’s four-source Documentary Hypothesis. Let us take a look at a common example of such an “internal inconsistency.” Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 apparently tell two different cosmological tales, which biblical critics break into two segments, 1:3-32 and 2:4b-24, attributing each of these segments to two distinct literary texts that were later compiled and redacted into a single book, Genesis. In the first story, God is depicted as having created all of the cosmos in six days: light and darkness on the first day; water and sky, the second day; land and vegetation, the third day; the sun, the moon, and the stars, the fourth day; sea animals and birds, the fifth day; and finally, land animals and man (and woman simultaneously) on the sixth day. The important point to note is the order of creation: vegetation, birds, land animals, and man.

In the second account, however, the creation of man seems to precede the creation of vegetation: “When no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted … the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth” (2:5-7, tr. JPS). Moreover, it appears that in this account, God creates land animals and birds
subsequent to the creation of man: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.’ And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them” (2:18-19). Shortly thereafter, God creates a woman for this man (2:20-22).

It seems that the first two chapters of Genesis depict the chronology of creation differently. Accordingly, Barton notes, “These two chapters contain what are essentially two different stories: in which humankind (both sexes) is created after the animals on the sixth day, and the other in which humans are there before the animals, and man before woman” (94). Surely this is indisputable. The question, instead, is whether this example of apparent textual conflict and others like it require the fragmentation of a text that presents itself as a whole.

As Barton presents it, biblical criticism considers the juxtaposition of these two tales to represent a “difficulty” within the text. Biblical criticism resolves this alleged “difficulty” through the elaborate Documentary Hypothesis mentioned above. According to this hypothesis, the existence of awkward inconsistencies within the text, such as in Genesis 1-2, requires that we postulate that a sub-stratum of text lies beneath the Pentateuch. In the most basic account, these sources are called J, E, D, and P (Yahwist, Elohist, Deutoronomistic, and Priestly). The alleged existence of these discrete literary texts which underlie the Pentateuch necessarily implies that there were editing stages in which disparate pre-biblical materials were placed alongside one another and awkwardly interspersed to form the books that today compose the Hebrew Bible, and consequently, the Christian Bible.

But is it really in any way possible to maintain that the author—or redactor, if you prefer—somehow overlooked the fact that these two accounts appear to describe two different creation stories? It seems unlikely, given that they are positioned adjacent to one another. The author, I would suggest, considered the juxtaposition of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 to be unproblematic. We might perhaps then be just as well served to consider the question of why the author considered this juxtaposition to be unproblematic, and perhaps this is a question of genre. (Efforts to postulate a conservative tendency in the redactor beg the question: they presuppose that there was a stage of redaction.)

The claim to meet a text “on its own terms” is partly a claim about an accurate perception of the text’s genre. To follow this suggestion further, it is not possible that we have seriously misunderstood the nature of genre, the unspoken conventions informing the construction of a text and the rules directing the literary-cognitive reception thereof, in general? Some unknown biblical author placed Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 beside one another, and the received Masoretic text leaves them so standing. It is a plausible inference that more than one person considered this juxtaposition to be unproblematic. The very fact that these two passages—i.e., these two allegedly problematic passages—open the Bible might instead suggest to the reader that a radically different standard of textual conflict is at work. By this interpretation, the genre of the Bible holds a special, interpretive status not because—as the rabbis maintained—it was the revealed word of God, but because it provides us hints that it wishes to be understood in this way. If this is the case, it is difficult to maintain that source criticism approaches the biblical text (in Barton’s language) “on its own terms.”

If we are to interpret the Bible “on its own terms,” should we not respect its own textual self-understanding? Moreover, in dividing the text into sources, sometimes at the level of phrases, have we really met the text “on its own terms?” Have our efforts to make sense of the text really been frustrated? Or is the frustration merely apparent? Must we resort to these layers and strata of sources? I have not been able, nor do I believe it possible, to answer this question definitively. But it is certainly a question that should arise.
Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age  
by Larry M. Bartels  
Princeton University Press, 328 pp., $29.95

A persistent debate between economists and political scientists concerns the extent to which political decisions can impact macroeconomic outcomes. Economists are usually skeptical when a politician courts voters by reminding them of his successful efforts at improving the economy. The same skepticism is usually applied to politicians running on campaigns to improve the economy. True, there are some things the government can do to interfere with economic growth—implementing protectionist policies, for example—but on the whole, politicians are powerless to reverse the tide of inexorable economic changes. Therefore, say the economists, any responsibility an incumbent takes for the economic state of the country is due to a spurious correlation between his term in office and the economic outcomes obtained during that period.

But are politicians really so powerless? During the 2008 elections, there was perhaps no more salient issue than the state of the economy. Liberalization of financial markets, the bursting of the housing bubble, and the indiscriminate use of untenable securities all helped to bring about the largest financial crisis since the Great Depression. When Americans elected Barack Obama, they were electing a political leader whom they trusted to ameliorate the economic crisis. Indeed, such retrospective voting on the basis of economic concerns is assumed to be one of the driving forces in electoral politics and voting behavior (Fiorina 1981). If we take the economists’ argument seriously and assume politicians have little to do with the state of the economy, then citizens who vote on the basis of their economic concerns appear seriously misguided in their behavior.

Larry Bartels’s Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age, published in 2008, is one of the most insightful analyses yet of the impact of politics on the economy. Bartels, a political scientist, has been conducting research on the relationships among income, political partisanship, and voting behavior since the late 1990s. When the political commentator Thomas Frank argued in What’s the Matter with Kansas that poor individuals in red states weren’t voting in their economic interests, it was Bartels who provided the sobering rejoinder reminding Frank and his readers that income has actually become a stronger factor in determining an individual’s political ideology. In the past twenty years, poorer people have become more reliable Democrats, while the rich have closely aligned themselves with Republicans. As Bartels notes, “the general trend in support for Democratic presidential candidates among whites in the bottom third of the income distribution has been upward, not downward” (Bartels 2008:73-74). Moreover, although it is true that Democratic presidential candidates have lost support among white voters over the past fifty years, this loss of support has been from relatively well-off white voters and “they have been partially offset by increasing support for Democratic candidates among poorer white Americans” (Bartels 2008:74).

Bartels’s book comes at an important point. Too often the political landscape of the country has been colored along blue and red lines. It is widely accepted that the country can be divided into red and blue states, and that somehow the poor are siding with Republicans on social issues, while ignoring their own economic interests. The neat
red and blue maps we saw in 2000 and 2004 were presented as proof that the country was divided and irrevocably split along regional lines. Bartels’s work, along with that of Morris Fiorina, David W. Brady, Pietro Nivola, and others, will help dispel some of these myths about the saliency of “culture issues” in shaping the voting behavior of the working and lower-middle classes.

The most astonishing finding in Bartels’s book is the consistently wide disparity in income inequality and real per capita GNP growth figures reported under Democratic as opposed to Republican presidents. To understand why this disparity occurs, we should begin by acknowledging that Democrats and Republicans seek different short-term economic objectives. In short, presidents are thought to exploit a short-run Phillips curve where inflation and unemployment are inversely related to each other (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995). When unemployment is high, inflation will be low; when unemployment is low, inflation tends to be high. Democratic presidents tend to trade off higher inflation for lower unemployment, but Republican presidents tend to prefer lower inflation while tolerating higher unemployment (Alesina, Roubini, and Cohen 1997; Hibbs 1988). This drive for different macroeconomic objectives produces what political scientists refer to as the political business cycle. The mechanism by which politicians are able to obtain higher or lower inflation and unemployment is still under some debate, but the fact that these macroeconomic objectives differ between Democrats and Republicans has become widely accepted in political economics (Hibbs 1988, Alesina and Rosenthal 1995).

Bartels wanted to see whether income inequality has any connection to the political party of the president. His analysis showed that between 1949 and 2005 there has emerged a more strongly partisan political economy, with economic inequality almost always increasing under Republican presidents and decreasing under Democratic presidents. As a corollary, income growth is also distributed differently under Democratic versus Republican administrations. For example, the average real per capita GNP growth since 1949 has been forty percent lower under Republicans than Democrats. Unemployment, whose effects are most strongly felt by the working class, has been 30% higher under Republican administrations. Incidentally, Democrats and Republicans do a relatively equal job of controlling inflation over the long term (Bartels 2008: 48).

Unequal Democracy could be just the scholarly work needed to make economists take notice of the potentially productive relationships that can develop between them and political scientists.

One could argue that the increasing growth in income inequality under Republican administrations and its reduction under Democratic administrations is merely a coincidence. Given that since 1949 there have been only eleven presidents, so surely some element of chance is involved in Bartels’ empirical findings. However, as Bartels notes, “the probability of observing no more than one exception [the Carter presidency] to the partisan pattern of increasing inequality under Republicans and decreasing inequality under Democrats in a random sequence of 11 increases and decreases would be 12/2,048=.006” (Bartels 2008: 36). There is less than a 0.6-percent chance of observing this pattern if it was merely a coincidence.

One of the most troubling aspects in these findings is the paucity of research that has been conducted to explain them. Most economists, as Bartels is quick to remind the reader, eschew political explanations in favor of seemingly more robust eco-
nomic ones. When talking about income inequality, one most often hears explanations invoking increased globalization, the increase in immigration, and the increasing income disparity between individuals with college degrees and those without them. Little mention is made of the fact that economies occur under the purview of political institutions and agents with different economic objectives.

Additionally, all three of these economic explanations are only successful at explaining income inequality between certain groups—immigrants versus natives, college-educated versus high school-educated—but they don’t explain why is that economic growth for the middle and lower classes remains startlingly different under Democratic and Republican administrations. These explanations also can’t account for the fact that wages for most Americans families have been largely stagnant throughout this decade, even as the top 1% has been accumulating a record share of the overall wealth (Bernstein 2008; Saez 2008; Saez and Piketty 2003).

Great scholarly tracts in the social sciences—Olson’s *The Logic of Collective Action*, Dahl’s *Who Governs*, Allison’s *Essence of Cooperation* immediately come to mind—inevitably raise just as many questions as they provide answers. In *Unequal Democracy*, Bartels provides to the curious reader some of the most provocative empirical findings in political science today. But there is still much to be done in cooperation with macroeconomists. First, more research is needed to understand how varying economic policies can disproportionately impact different socio-economic groups. For example, is Keynesian macroeconomic policy more conducive to raising real per capita GNP for the middle classes and lower classes, or can this be accomplished just as well under other economic models, e.g. those of the Chicago or Austrian Schools? Such an investigation would let us see if Keynesian economic policies, generally associated with Democratic presidents, are responsible for Bartels’s findings that the middle class experiences higher income growth. Or perhaps we would find that long-term macroeconomic outcomes are largely the same for all socio-economic groups, regardless whether the president’s policies are more characteristic of Keynesian or Chicago School economics.

Second, economists need to forge an alliance between political scientists and sociologists so as to ensure a more holistic view of how economies work in different societies. Too often, economists, in their drive to formulate internally consistent models and convoluted equations, ignore the impact of political and social institutions. Bartels and the political scientist Henry W. Brady have addressed this concern. In 2003, they published a paper in the American Economic Review urging economists to abandon their “overreliance on standard economic models and methods” and instead engage “in a more constructive research style combining the theoretical and empirical rigor of economics with a broader and more eclectic approach familiar to political scientists” (Bartels and Brady 2003:156). *Unequal Democracy* could be just the scholarly work needed to make economists take notice of the potentially productive relationships that can develop between them and political scientists. Furthermore, it may finally require them to acknowledge what most voters have always known: *politics really does matter.*
It is a testament to the intricacy of Alan Moore’s craftsmanship that his celebrated graphic novel Watchmen is still able to generate lengthy interpretive debates more than twenty years after its publication. One particularly divisive debate concerns the respective moralities of the characters Rorschach and Veidt. One side sees Rorschach as a forgotten hero and a man of unwavering morality, and Veidt as a narcissistic psychopath. The other sees Rorschach as a hypocrite and an extremist, and Veidt as a savior of humanity. Navigating discussions of the book from scholarly reviews to online message boards, it seems one cannot read the book without taking a side.

This fierce factionalism depends on the idea that Rorschach and Veidt have next to nothing in common, and this notion doesn’t stand up very well under scrutiny. A closer look at the text reveals that Rorschach and Veidt are best described as opposite sides of the same coin, and in this light, any argument that condemns one character while praising the other is totally untenable. At first glance, Veidt and Rorschach appear to be diametrically opposed in practically every respect. Rorschach is so committed to his persona that he refers to his mask as his “face,” and refuses to retire or reveal his true identity; Veidt quit adventuring by choice, and has since grown famous under his own name. Rorschach was born in poverty, whereas Veidt was born into wealth. Veidt is among the most influential men in the world, while Rorschach is a social outcast. Rorschach is conservative. Veidt is liberal. Rorschach’s character chapter (“The Abyss Gazes Also”) ends with a solid black panel, and Veidt’s chapter (“Look On My Works, Ye Mighty…”) ends with a blank white panel. Rorschach firmly believes that “there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished” (1.24.6), whereas Veidt is a relativist and a utilitarian. Last but certainly not least, Rorschach is the hero of Watchmen, and Veidt is the villain.

In the light of the debate I described at the beginning of this essay, this last statement hardly looks like a given. Indeed, readers are right to object to this claim, for Moore unequivocally refuses to validate or condemn any of the actions of his characters. If any character can be said to represent Moore’s attitude, it is Jon as he appears at the very end of the text: when Veidt asks “I did the right thing, didn’t I? It all worked out in the end,” Jon replies, “Nothing ever ends” (12.27.4-5). Labeling Rorschach as the hero and Veidt as the villain of Watchmen is clearly an oversimplification, but the degree to which they conform neatly to the respective stereotypes of protagonist and antagonist is still worth noting. Rorschach is a man of principles, albeit extreme ones, who refuses to compromise what he believes in and ultimately is martyred for his beliefs. Veidt is the mastermind behind the Comedian’s death and Jon’s exile, and he describes his master plan to his adversaries in typical, if self-conscious, supervillain fashion. The oppositions between Veidt and Rorschach that I have recounted are far too systematic to be coincidental, and it is easy to see how they collectively contribute to the polarization of the Watchmen fan base into supporters of Veidt and supporters of Rorschach.

Consider the fifth chapter of Watchmen, entitled

Ben Brubaker is a second-year in the College, majoring in English Language and Literature.
“Fearful Symmetry.” Its title comes from William Blake’s poem *The Tyger*. The question explored by Blake’s poem is whether a benevolent and omniscient God really could have created a beast as terrifying as the tiger, whether something so destructive can ultimately be a force for good. Moore plays around with the literal motif of symmetry throughout the chapter: the Rumrunners sign hanging outside Moloch’s apartment (5.1.1) and the literal doubling accomplished by mirrors in both scenes involving Dan and Laurie (5.10.6 and 5.19.2) are both prime examples. But the most obvious symbol of symmetry in the chapter is Rorschach himself: his symmetrical signature appears for the first time in this chapter (5.3.9), and a close-up of his mask accompanies the title (5.4.1). The placement of the title suggests that Moore intended Blake’s *Tyger* as a metaphor for Rorschach, and this hypothesis is reinforced by lines like “This guy’s an animal” (5.26.9) and the admittedly forced “Remember, herebetrygers” (5.26.3). Interpreted this way, the chapter seems to be exploring whether a vigilante as extreme in his methods as Rorschach can really be doing good, and this meshes very well with the central question of Moore’s text: “Who watches the watchmen?”

But this interpretation of “Fearful Symmetry” doesn’t tell the whole story. Few readers realize that Moore does not limit his manipulation of the theme of symmetry to individual symmetric images. In fact, the chapter itself is symmetrical: the first and last scenes show Rorschach in Moloch’s apartment, the second and second-to-last follow the detectives, the third and third-to-last take place at the Newsstand, and so forth. Even the chapter’s panel structure is symmetric; a glance at pages 6 and 23, or 10 and 19, should be enough to make this clear. At the center of the chapter (5.14-15) is the attempt on Veidt’s life, and a very unusual panel structure that abounds with visual symmetry: the assassin’s head and the Egyptian sculpture are horizontal reflections of each other, and each is vertically reflected in the pool at the bottom of the panel. The vase with which Veidt attacks the assassin is reflected across the page divide, as is the giant V representing Veidt and his company that looms above the scene. If symmetry is associated with Blake’s *Tyger*, and Veidt is at the center of the greater symmetry of the chapter itself, then shouldn’t the metaphor of *The Tyger* apply to Veidt as well as to Rorschach? Sure enough, to an even greater degree than Rorschach, Veidt causes widespread destruction with astonishing precision and pre-science, and Moore leaves it to his readers to decide whether his actions were for the best.

The metaphor of *The Tyger*, then, unites the otherwise diametrically opposed characters of Veidt and Rorschach. But it is hardly the only link between them. If we consider other symbols and metaphors explicitly associated with either Veidt or Rorschach throughout *Watchmen*, we will find that, almost invariably, they actually describe both characters. Take, for instance, “Marooned,” a fictional comic in the world of *Watchmen* that acts as a running commentary on the events of the Moore’s text. “Marooned” is the story of the single survivor of a ship destroyed by the fearsome Black Freighter, who resorts to increasingly desperate measures to get back to the mainland and warn his hometown
of the ship’s approach. As the history of pirate comics in the chapter 5 end matter puts it, “though he has escaped from his island, [the protagonist] is in the end marooned from the rest of humanity in a much more terrible fashion.” This description echoes the line from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* that serves as the epigraph for Rorschach’s character chapter: “Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you” (6.28.9).

The analogy between Rorschach and the protagonist of “Marooned” is clear: just as the nameless mariner commits atrocity after atrocity in an effort to stop similar atrocities occurring in his hometown, Rorschach turns increasingly to criminal activity in order to fight crime. In one scene in “Marooned,” the mariner kills and eats a giant shark “with skin neither black nor wholly white” (5.20.3), and it is no coincidence that on the very next page, the detectives receive an anonymous tip to the whereabouts of “Raw Shark” (5.22.7). But if the mariner appears to be a surrogate for Rorschach throughout most of the text, he ultimately resembles nobody more than Veidt. Veidt tells Jon that he dreams “about swimming towards a hideous…no. Never mind. It isn’t important” (12.27.1), recalling the very end of “Marooned,” when the mariner realizes what he has done, and voluntarily swims out towards the Black Freighter. Veidt goes on to say “I know I’ve struggled across the backs of murdered innocents to save humanity” (12.27.2), a clear reference to the mariner’s literal journey to the mainland on a raft made of human corpses. Both the Mariner and Veidt are driven by a desire to save their homes, and both end up destroying them. All of a sudden, the epigraph of Rorschach’s character chapter sounds an awful lot like a description of Veidt.

An analysis of the symbol of the Gordian Knot similarly complicates our initial conception of Rorschach and Veidt as polar opposites. According to the legend that Veidt is so fond of retelling, countless men tried and failed to untie the knot until Alexander the Great put an end to the matter by simply cutting it in half. Veidt fashions himself as a present-day Alexander, and he draws an explicit analogy between the tale of the Gordian Knot and his own master plan when he tells Rorschach and Nite Owl that “an intractable problem can only be resolved by stepping beyond conventional solutions” (11.25.5). But despite Veidt’s conscious attempt to become the Alexander of the twentieth century, it is Rorschach who cuts Gordian knots in the most literal sense throughout *Watchmen*: when he kicks down Moloch’s front door, the broken lock reads “Gordian Knot Lock Co.” (5.3.4), and on two separate occasions (3.8.1 and 8.8.6) a repairman from Gordian Knot shows up at Dan Dreiberg’s house in the aftermath of a surprise visit from Rorschach. The notion that solving the world’s problems requires “stepping beyond conventional solutions” describes Rorschach’s attitude as well as Veidt’s. In light of the subtle parallels we have thus far observed between Rorschach and Veidt, I would go so far as to say that the only difference between them lies in the direction in which they choose to step.

Lastly, consider the thematic role that Hiroshima plays in *Watchmen*, most obviously as a symbol of the threat of the nuclear war that many believe will soon become a reality. It is Hiroshima that sets Jon on the career path that will ultimately lead to his transformation into Dr. Manhattan, and Hiroshima that the psychiatrist Malcolm Long thinks of when he sees the silhouette of a couple spray painted on a wall on Seventh Avenue (6.27.3).
The end matter to chapter 6 contains an essay in which a young Walter Kovacs wrote, “I think it was a good thing to drop the atomic bomb on Japan” (6.e.3), and Rorschach expresses a similar view in the present tense of the story when he writes in his journal that that the “vermin” he despises “could have followed in the footsteps of good men like my father or President Truman” (1.1.4). But it is Veidt, not Rorschach, who has most closely followed in Truman’s footsteps: the prominence of the “Hiroshima Lovers” among the destruction at the beginning of the last chapter (12.5.1) suggests an analogy between Hiroshima and Veidt’s master plan, and a newscaster later makes this explicit when he describes the scene in New York as “Like Hiroshima, but with buildings” (12.25.2). On reflection, there must not be such a great difference between Rorschach’s black-and-white moral philosophy and Veidt’s relativism if they allow both men to justify such similar actions. Indeed, the idea that “there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished” starts to look a lot like utilitarianism when utilitarians concede that the greatest good can entail horrible suffering for some, and the punishment advocated by absolutists becomes hard to distinguish from the evil they condemn.

The true “fearful symmetry” of Watchmen lies in the fact that Veidt and Rorschach look like distorted reflections of each other once we learn to see past their surface differences. This is not to accuse either Rorschach or Veidt of hypocrisy or claim that Moore’s sympathies really lie with the other character. Rather, I believe that Moore’s refusal to endorse the actions of either character is deliberate. The last line of Watchmen, “I leave it entirely in your hands” (12.32.7), seems directed as much towards the reader as it is towards the clueless Seymour, in whose reach lies the power to expose Veidt’s plan and undermine the foundation of his new utopia. This last panel leaves two big questions unanswered. First, does the New Frontiersman publish Rorschach’s journal and reveal Veidt as the architect of the tragedy in New York? Second, and more importantly, would such a revelation vindicate Rorschach’s refusal to compromise his principles, or would it undermine the peace Veidt worked so hard to achieve? Moore seems to invite us to answer this second question for ourselves, while making us acutely aware that other readers will use the same evidence to justify a radically different answer. Rorschach and Veidt are willing to resort to extreme measures to remake the world according to their principles, and that both have the power to attract devoted followers convinced of their moral rectitude from among Watchmen’s readership. If the central question of Moore’s text is “Who watches the watchmen,” then perhaps Rorschach and Veidt need to be watched equally closely. By weaving overt oppositions and subtle parallels between Rorschach and Veidt into Watchmen, Moore warns his readers not to condemn one self-proclaimed hero as a hypocrite while letting the actions of another go unmonitored.
At first flush, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* seems to be just another adolescent love story, pulpy and lacking in substance but ultimately inoffensive. The characters, certainly, present no surprises. Lovely Bella Swan, whose personality is sparse enough to allow crush-hungry teenage girls to identify along, plays the female lead. Her male counterpart is the aloof, smoldering Edward Cullen, a vampire who has loftily sworn off human blood. The moral message follows neatly: despite mutual attraction, they must at all costs remain chaste. The correspondence between sexual desire and bloodlust is precise and unmistakable: like that between vampirism and male desire, or between mortality and female vulnerability. Men are strong and hungry, women are weak and tempting, and the physical consummation of male desire leads to female ruination. What could be more familiar?

But *Twilight* is more than an old-fashioned romance with supernatural trimmings, despite its resemblance to the pregnancy-scare yarns of yore. Some features of the setting do contribute to an old-timey atmosphere. Cell phones and computers rarely appear, and Bella’s hobbies seem limited to cooking, shopping, and daydreaming about Edward. There’s even a Sadie Hawkins dance—girls’ choice! But to say that *Twilight* is a faithful depiction of a bygone time is to dangerously oversimplify its attitude toward gender roles and sexual politics, which in truth is much more nuanced and formidable.

Seen in this light, the extreme popularity of the *Twilight* franchise is disheartening, if not surprising—its target demographic of teenage girls is not known for its political discernment. More worrisome is the general approbation Meyers’s series has met with in the popular press. *Publishers Weekly*, the ALA, and even *The Atlantic* have featured laudatory reviews of the series. The literary world has perpetuated the thoroughly unfounded myth that the relationship it depicts is innocent and old-fashioned. But to mistake its heavy-handed abstinence agenda for a refreshing wholesomeness is dangerously wrongheaded.

Even scattered criticisms of the books’ troubling sexual politics overlook the radicality of Meyer’s portrayal of feminism and femininity. In a 2008 article in *Bitch Magazine*, Christine Seifert writes, “Edward… and Bella are just like our traditional grandparents. Or the Moral Majority. Bella is a throwback to a 1950s housewife, except for the fact that Edward has turned her into a vampire.” It is true, and important, that Meyer’s writing is saturated with a nostalgic idealization of generations past. But Seifert’s reading disregards a crucial aspect of the gender relations Meyer describes.

The world of *Twilight* has a decidedly post-feminist consciousness. Bella writes an English paper on “whether Shakespeare’s treatment of the female characters is misogynistic.” She insists repeatedly—if a little unconvincingly, given her propensity for getting into life-threatening scrapes—on her ability to take care of herself. She even objects (though only once, and weakly) to the protective attitude Edwards takes toward her: “it just seems logical . . . a man and woman have to be somewhat equal . . . as in, one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other equally.”

Bella’s behavior as a whole, though, overrides her protestations. Ultimately, her prim, correct principles can’t stand up to Edward’s seduction. Until Bella meets Edward, she is a virgin in theory as well as in practice: before him, no boy had ever in-

---

Kira Bennett graduated from the College in 2008 with a degree in Philosophy and Allied Fields.
interested her. She is captivated, invigorated, by her desire for him; everything else she does—though, admittedly, the list is short, consisting mostly of writing papers, doing laundry, and cooking dinner for her father—pales in comparison to his marble skin. When he kisses her, she is overcome; she loses herself in lust and occasionally faints. Her obsessive immersion is presented to the reader as the highest good, the only genuine pleasure available to a woman.

Meyers suggests that, tragically, this pleasure is hard to come by in the modern world. Bella is charmed by none of the numerous classmates who offer to carry her books or take her to prom. Only Edward the vampire, with his supernatural grace, his preternatural strength, and his unearthly ability to sit awake by his sleeping girlfriend’s bedside, can offer Bella what she wants: an escape from her tranquil, cloistered, and thoroughly boring life.

_Twilight_ follows innumerable adolescent love stories—natural and supernatural—in portraying female desire as obsessive and transformative if not downright self-destructive. But the book is unusual in the degree to which it contains a repudiation of modern adolescence, and especially of modern womanhood. Bella is no naïf, and _Twilight_ no old-fashioned tale.

Likewise, the relationship between Edward and Bella, though technically abstinent, is anything but innocent. The dynamics between them are overwhelmingly characterized by predation and dependence. Edward lurks by Bella’s bedside and spies telepathically on her conversations. He reminds her solemnly and repeatedly that he would kill her if he ever lost control of his desire. She is thrilled by the prospect.

These facts are troubling enough, but the circumstances in which they come to light are even more problematic. Significantly, the menacing inequality between Bella and Edward is not the result of naïveté; it arises from Bella’s rejection of egalitarian relationships. At the beginning of _Twilight_, Bella leaves Phoenix, where she and her mother have been living happily together, so that her mother can accompany her stepfather on his business trips. Transplanted to Oregon, she placidly steps into the role of homemaker for her father. He reciprocates by buying her a car, and she is touched: “I wasn’t used to being taken care of,” she admits. Soon, she becomes enamored of the dangerous Edward, who quickly comes to dominate her life. She follows a clear trajectory of increasingly powerful male domination, and her only desire is for more—more self-sacrifice, more alteration of her character, and more violence.

This is a form of subjugation from which there is no escape, because it essentially constitutes the selfhood of its victim. More radically even than Andrea Dworkin suggests, Bella is defined by how she is made: as a mortal woman, she inherently longs to be overpowered and obliterated by a man who is wholly unlike her. The world of _Twilight_ is unlike Dworkin’s. Bella’s longing is not socially constituted; rather than being a cultural imposition, it is an innate quality that perseveres in the face of contrary social pressures. Far from approving of the sinister Edward, Bella’s friends and family members try to guide her away from him toward relationships with fellow humans. Bella herself fitfully parrots acquired feminist talking points: “I can’t always be Lois Lane. I want to be Superman, too.” But ultimately, Bella isn’t interested in her less dangerous peers, and her egalitarian façade can’t compete with the thrill of being overpowered by her lover. She turns her back on her ideals, and on her friends, in favor of Edward. Given a room of her own, Bella longs for a man to break down her door.

The message of _Twilight_ isn’t that young girls dream of romance, or even that egalitarian ideals aren’t enough to keep a gal warm on a cold and lonely night. It’s that the kinds of relationships demanded by the ideals of what Bella regards as feminism—that cruel mistress!—are incongruous with a woman’s true inner desires. In the _Twilight_ world, Meyer reduces (her already impoverished) feminism to a social more that is as alien and arbitrary as any nicety of Victorian society. Only by escaping it, she suggests, can a woman find fulfillment.
THE SPACE OF THE UNIVERSITY: NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND
by Ardevan Yaghoubi

If one were to imagine a house consisting of basement, ground floor and first floor, planned in such a way that there is a difference of class between the occupants of each floor—and if now one were to compare being a human being with such a house, then the sorry and ludicrous fact with most people is, alas, that in their own house they prefer to live in the basement…. This is the building [they say], but he prefers living in the basement—no, he loves it so much that he is indignant if anyone suggests he occupy the fine suite lying vacant for him; after all, he is living in his own house!

—Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death

What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? … What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?

—Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space

Let us begin from the bottom up: the dominant architectural motif of the University of Chicago is the basement. Among undergraduates, the coffee shop in the basement of Cobb Hall is undoubtedly the most popular leisure space on campus; the fluorescent-lit upper floors of the Regenstein Library, which function as academic space, are virtually indistinguishable from the underground floors; even the student dormitories, habitable space, could be confused for subterranean bunkers. And, given the importance of myth, it is noteworthy that prospective and enrolled students alike circulate rumors of the possibility, even likelihood, of a network of clandestine underground tunnels.

What to make of this basementality? In the twentieth century, basements took on special significance from the emerging fields of psychoanalytic theory and architecture. For psychoanalysts seeking to make sense of our linguistic slips and selective memories, the basement was a metaphor for the unconscious and, therefore, our true desires. Concurrently, the events of 1968 and the writings of the Situationist movement in France placed a new emphasis on questions of public space, the history of the city and urbanism, design, and architecture. Both disciplines shared an interest in the relationship of the subject to space, be it the mental space of the psyche or the physical space of the city. In his underacknowledged but groundbreaking work The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard, a Frenchman working on the foundations of phenomenology, constructed the neologism “topoanalysis,” which he defined as “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.” For us in the here and now, the University of Chicago is the site of our intimate lives, and my purpose in this essay is to present a potential topoanalysis of the rapidly changing shape of our present institution.

What is in play today is nothing short of a wide-ranging attempt to reframe the University using standards of instrumental logic. The most egregious manifestation of this principle is the creation of the Milton Friedman Institute, although no one could claim they were shocked by its creation: the move to eliminate the Uncommon Application can be seen as a symbolic precursor (it was more economical, it was argued, to shift

Ardevan Yaghoubi is a first-year in the College.
to the Common Application). What makes the Milton Friedman Institute particularly worthy of analysis is the ironic timing of the announcement, just as the worldwide economy enters crisis. On campus, budget cuts have had palpable effects, such as the significant loss of funding for journals like *Critical Inquiry* and *Modern Philology*, as well as placing financial aid and student scholarships at risk. Simultaneously, the *Maroon* reported that “the University plans to invest $200 million in the [Milton Friedman Institute],” at least half of which will be the University’s own. All this in the context of an imploding financial world where even the staunchest “maestro” of deregulation, Alan Greenspan, is left to admit in the pages of *The New York Times* that he has “found a flaw…” [in his] ideology.” For our purposes, though, Greenspan’s guilt was the second most interesting thing he said during his hearing on Capitol Hill. “The whole intellectual edifice,” he stated, “collapsed in the summer of last year.” This brings us full circle, for what the financial crisis is truly about is the collapse of edifice as a whole, first and foremost, intellectual or otherwise. And what is the Milton Friedman Institute if not an intellectual edifice par excellence? Or does it lack edifice? Is it pure intellect?

The answer is where our understanding of the space of the university takes a radical turn. The Milton Friedman Institute is, like the state of capital itself today, pure abstraction, floating, not anchored by specific geometric coordinates: it is both place and non-place. One cannot “go” to the Milton Friedman Institute. Despite purchasing the Chicago Theological Seminary’s building on 58th Street, University officials explained, according to the *Maroon*, that nonetheless, “everything will stay the same except legal ownership.” The Seminary Co-op Bookstore, another academic space located in the basement of the CTS, said they had no plans to move for “at least a couple years.” This makes even more curious the statement found in a *Maroon* article in May of 2008: “According to Zimmer’s e-mail, the Institute will be ready to open its doors in the fall of 2008.” There is no paradox here, I contend, between these contradicting stories; the conflicting messages are subject to what Slavoj Žižek wrote to describe the multiple, shifting justifications of the Iraq war:

> “such an enumeration of inconsistent arguments of course confirms per negationem what it endeavors to deny.”

The doors of the Milton Friedman Institute will perhaps never open. *Everything will stay the same* is indeed the slogan, because the Milton Friedman Institute always already occupies space in a pure sense. The concrete and the plaster are extraneous.

Proof of this lack of substance, or edifice, can be found in the rhetoric of those who oppose the Milton Friedman Institute. The critique that began with the forceful history of the Chicago Boys’ legacy—the real blood, real violence that Friedman and his intellectual heirs created in Latin America and elsewhere—was dissipated to a banal debate over changing the name of the Institute alone. As is so often the case, simply capitulating to the demands of the Left would actually set them back further: “The Chicago Economic Freedom Institute” or something like it would be a far more insidious case of totalitarian new-speak; at least give the free-marketers credit for being honest. But the important point here is that the opposition was reduced to fighting on the level of signifier, mere name, because of the fact there was nothing else to be opposed to. How does one oppose a non-space, a non-event? Where does one protest in non-space? A similar problem plagues those questioning the wider system of capitalism today, for whom the answer takes form, far too often, in the chaos of the street riot (total space), as seen with unfortunate regularity in France, or in even “purer” forms of spectacular terror. The very simple question can be asked: Why not oppose the Milton Friedman Institute as a whole?

But there is no “opposing” the Milton Friedman Institute in the strict sense of the word, from the outside, just as there is no “opposing” the expansion of capital to the third world today. The new imperialism does not announce its intention to invade, it does not sign declarations of war, it exists everywhere and nowhere simultaneously—in short, in space. Lefebvre says as much in *The Production of Space*, explaining by way of the Christian Church that ideology does not only reside in the walls and the floors:

> The Christian ideology…has created spaces which
guarantee that it endures. But more generally speaking, what we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein. Ideology per se might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space.

This “body” no longer exists, at least for the Milton Friedman Institute. It has disappeared into abstraction. Fittingly, defenders of the Institute have explained that the research conducted will be non-political, non-ideological, and unbiased. As Lars Hansen, the faculty chair of the research committee for the Institute, was quoted as saying in the Maroon, “This is not an institute with a political agenda.” The attempt to place the Institute discursively outside the realm of ideology only further entrenches it in politicization. This process of reification is exactly what Althusser meant when he wrote, “It is necessary to be outside ideology, i.e. in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: ‘I am in ideology.’” The appeal to scientific knowledge is exactly the move that the Friedman Institute has made, and in doing so, we come perhaps closest to truly “seeing” where the Institute resides: it is a wholly discursive space.

Lefebvre, later in the book, explains that the signifier “merely reflects…instead of challenging” (and therein lies the true reason why no member of the Institute agreed to debate Naomi Klein). Instead, we must pull back the curtain for ourselves, to go behind the space, as it were, rather than oppose it head-on. Lefebvre explains:

A representation which passes itself off as a concept, when it is merely an image, a mirror, and a mirage…instead of challenging, instead of refusing, merely reflects… “Behind the curtain there is nothing to see,” Hegel wrote ironically. Unless, of course, we go behind the curtain ourselves, because someone has to be there to see, and for there to be something to see. In space, or behind it, there is no unknown substance, no mystery. And yet this transparency is deceptive, and everything is concealed: space is illusory and the secret of the illusion lies in the transparency itself. The apparatus of power and knowledge that is revealed once we have “drawn the curtain” has therefore nothing of smoke and mirrors about it.

We ought to remember that another claim made by supporters of the Milton Friedman Institute is its role in honoring, for better or worse, a man of great importance to the University’s recent history. As one economics professor wondered aloud, again in the pages of the Maroon, “how many free marketers would get jobs in anthropology or sociology?”—a tacit acknowledgement of the ideological divide between disciplines. If the question is honoring Chicago’s intellectual tradition, where are the names of the dozens of canonical (and not necessarily leftist) thinkers and philosophers affiliated with the University? Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty, Leo Strauss, John Dewey, Rudolf Carnap, Allan Bloom, and Susan Sontag have all exerted and absorbed influence from the University of Chicago, but rarely are these connections publicized in the way our great Economists are.

Given Lefebvre’s call to draw back the curtain, as a counterweight to the Milton Friedman Institute, I hereby establish the Paul Ricoeur Institute. The mission of the Paul Ricoeur Institute is to support research on important policy-related questions through the application of philosophical, specifically hermeneutical, analysis. It will be unbiased in analyzing the works and opinions of the late philosopher and his influences in relation to the problems of today. Paul Ricoeur represents an approximate intellectual anchor for the University of Chicago, given his fifteen-year faculty position here where he influenced legions of students, as well as his importance as a leading intellectual and thinker in the 20th century.

Finally, let the Paul Ricoeur Institute reside in the basement of the Milton Friedman Institute, in its chthonic subconscious. Carl Jung wrote: “The conscious acts like a man who, hearing a suspicious noise in the cellar, hurries to the attic and, finding no burglars there decides, consequently, that the noise was pure imagination. In reality, this prudent man did not dare venture into the cellar.” With the financial system espoused by Friedman and others on the verge of collapse, what metaphor better explains the decision to create the Milton Friedman Institute, now? It is the anxious man running to attic, knowing full well that he must, someday, encounter what is in the basement.
SOURCES

New Sincerity in a Postmodern World

Oppositional Politics under President Obama: Thoughts on a Left Approach
Economics and Politics: Inequality and Partisan Politics

The Sexual Politics of Twilight
We are now accepting applications to join the staff of *The Midway Review*. Please visit our website, [http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/](http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/), for more details. Applications are due Monday, April 20th by midnight. Article submissions to *The Midway Review* are due Friday, April 24th by midnight.