

Summer 1992

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Cleveland State University

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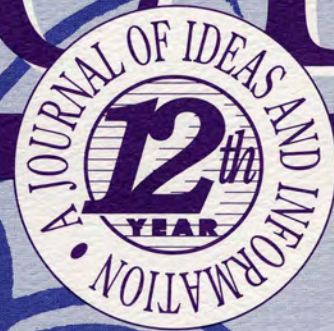


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T ♦ H ♦ E

GAMUT

NUMBER 36 • SUMMER 1992 • \$6.00



▲
Cartoon Contest Winners

also:

Inflation and the Consumer

The Sixties: Beatniks in Witchita, Kansas

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About the Cover:

Detail from one of the submissions in our cartoon contest. See page 5.

T ♦ H ♦ E
GAMUT

Number 36
Summer 1992



EDITORIAL

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Louis T. Milic

When political figures come under scrutiny it is usually for the wrong reasons, for juicy but venial offenses that stir gossip and envy. The real abuse of power lies not in free haircuts or bounced checks but in campaign financing.

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Through surprise, condensation, and allusion, cartoons reveal to us the foibles of our age and the rebel hidden in us all. Three prize-winning cartoons plus eight honorable mentions.

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Though there is no such thing as an average household, the market basket of this hypothetical family can, when reflected in the Consumer Price Index, help real households manage their budgets in inflationary times.

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When the Beat movement arrived in Wichita, Kansas, beatniks and hobos came to the Beanery for "jailhouse chili" and artistic freedom. But the Midwest could not tolerate such nonconformity and shut the place down.

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Immediately after its formation in 1789, the Supreme Court began to define its powers and duties despite the amorphous instructions in the Constitution. It established for itself the power and dignity that Chief Justice John Marshall was later to consolidate. But for the first justices, the Court was more often a chore than a high honor.

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Born into the fragmented world of Hungary in the early twentieth century, József created some of that nation's greatest poetry out of the poverty and instability of his circumstances.

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Equal opportunity should begin with public education since education, not dispensation, should be the way to enter the aristocracy of talent.

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From 1862 to 1865 Johnson's Island, in Lake Erie near Marblehead, Ohio, was the site of a prison camp for Confederate soldiers. A beautifully made ring recently excavated there helps us speculate about the conditions and activities of those prisoners.

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by John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman

Reviewed by Mark Gottlieb

Editorial

Perks: The Other Side

We've been hearing a lot about Congressional perquisites recently. And many Representatives, accused of having, using, and abusing these, are either retiring or threatened with losing their seats to puritanical attackers of the other party. The public, we are told, is sick (or sick and tired, or enraged) at the sight of these arrogant and out-of-touch politicians taking advantage of the taxpayers. Before we join the blame-throwers, let us have a look at this mysterious entity. What is a perquisite (as opposed to a perk)?

The word has a long and interesting history. Its origin is a Latin verb meaning to search persistently for something. In English, it first meant (in Chaucer's time) property acquired by some means other than inheritance (the usual legitimate method in those days). A century later it broadened to mean extra (rather than regular) earnings, and finally came to mean "gratuity" during the time of Queen Anne and the Georges. An example of this sense might shed some light on the current situation. When gentlemen and ladies were guests at a country house, they were expected to pay "vails" (tips, related to the word "value") to the servants on leaving. Although servants were hardly ever paid in cash by their masters, they received room, board, clothing, and necessaries as their regular earnings. The vails, persistently sought for, were their perquisites or extra, gotten by virtue of their office. Anyone who did not pay vails got no service the next time around. Constituents find themselves in the same situation with their Congressional servants.

Their perks, we have been told many times, include free shaves or hair bobs—some of them have not been using this perquisite as much as they should have—use of a gym and a pool, and a few other services, whose value is more symbolic than intrinsic. One would have to get a haircut once a week to gain \$500 extra a year by means of this perk. No, the value of the perk is that people like Feighan, Stokes, and others have them and the rest of us don't. That's the difference between a perk and a perquisite.

The actual perquisites of Congressional office are the legal bribes ("campaign contributions") donated by the lobbyists representing commercial interests and wishing to influence legislation. Only those who have an office that can influence legislation are entitled to such perquisites. Those are the perquisites the public should be railing against and from time to time has been but without any real hope of changing this shameful and corrupt system. That's why the public has taken after the politicians where they seem vulnerable even though perks are not the problem.

After all, we are a nation of status seekers: we constantly hear about respect, dignity, pride, and other bits of ego gratification. What host leading a party of eaters into a restaurant is not warmed by hearing the proprietor murmur "Your usual table, sir"? What constituent would not sell his soul for the VIP tour of the White House or the Capitol? When he gives special cufflinks to his guests, is the President of the United States trying to encourage the wearing of French cuffs or slaking the thirst for privilege of the members of our classless society? Is a dinner at the White House valuable because the food is superior or the conversation reminiscent of the salon of Madame de Sévigné? We love status and will do anything to get it, it seems. And we envy those who have it. That is the shady emotion behind the perk scandal. The real scandal is the lack of interest in campaign financing reform.

We still have in our minds the picture of Washington refusing to be addressed as Your Excellency, Jefferson riding to his inauguration on a horse all the way from Monticello, Lincoln as a Congressman living alone in a room in a boarding house on C Street, Jackson inviting his uncouth followers in to wreck the furnishings of the White House after his inauguration, and even Harry Truman taking a walk with the reporters every morning. Those images are mythical, even if accurate, but they don't reflect the reality of our awkward, muddled, and complex government. A wise man once said that corruption in government keeps it working because the corrupt will not abuse a process they benefit by as long as the voters are satisfied. Apparently they are no longer satisfied.

Louis J. Micheli

Winners of *The Gamut* Cartoon Prize, 1992

First Prize:
\$500
Mark Heath
Intervale NH

Second Prize:
\$200
Scott Mendenhall
University Hts. OH

Third Prize:
\$100
Sheila Forsyth
and Margaret Hyland
Fayetteville NY

Honorable Mention: Bruce Biro, Cleveland, Ohio; Roy Delgado, Washington, D.C.; Jerry Fuchs, Dover, New Jersey; Jerry King, Columbus, Ohio; Greg Nelson, Mentor, Ohio; Rick Stromoski, Suffield, Connecticut; William A. Vanselow, Roseville, California; and Thomas L. Wojciechowicz, Willowick, Ohio.

Guest judge: Ray Osrin, cartoonist for *The Plain Dealer* since 1963.

Editorial judges: Louis Milic, Leonard Trawick, Susan Dumbrys, and James Guilford.

Stiff Paper

Like a diamond-splitter, the creator of a single-panel cartoon must succeed with a single blow, at once delivering characters, a situation, and a punch that strikes the reader with delighted surprise. The tools of the trade are an ear for current speech, an eye for the foibles and fads of the hour, an instinct for the audience's preconceptions, and a drawing style that can convey a world in a few casual-seeming strokes.

The idea is the soul of any cartoon. As their first criterion the judges of our contest asked: did the idea—through surprise, cleverness, or sheer outrageousness—make us laugh? Drawing, the second criterion, must give life to the original inspiration. Of course the idea itself may be visual, and often a drawing conveys a tone and character that makes the whole idea work. At a minimum the judges expected graphic skill completely adequate to convey the intellectual idea. Since cartoons depend so much on what each reader brings to them, it is not surprising that reactions vary greatly, as the *Gamut* judges found when they voted on the prizes. Each judge was par-





Anonymous 15th-century satirical drawing representing the Pope as a devil.

ticularly tickled by a different entry. In the end, we all arrived at an increased respect for this deceptively simple-seeming genre.

It is in fact an art with a venerable history. *Cartoon* comes from the Italian word for “stiff paper”; it originally referred to drawings such as artists would make in preparation for a painting. For centuries the most famous cartoons were drawings of this sort made by Raphael, not at all humorous. But people have always made funny pictures. Since humor tends to be topical and ephemeral, its graphic expression lends itself to a quick, concise medium such as the line drawing. With the improvement of printing in the seventeenth century, humorous engravings began to appear in books and broadsides. And when in the eighteenth century words were added to the pictures, cartooning as we know it was under way.

Nowadays *cartoon* usually means one of three things: a movie or television production consisting of animated drawings; a comic strip; or, our main concern in these pages, a single-panel drawing, often with a spoken line as a caption. The comic strip differs from the single-panel cartoon in that it always gives us a story, a sequence of actions. The story may be a short anecdote conveyed in only two or three panels, as in daily strips like *Beetle Bailey* and *Calvin and Hobbes*; or it may continue interminably, like *Mary Worth*. But even the anecdotal strips have a stable cast of characters whose personalities have been built up over many episodes, and much of their

Below: Detail from Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751).





George Cruikshank satirizes the precociousness of modern children: a little girl is telling her grandmother how to suck duck eggs.

attractiveness comes from our anticipation of the characters' behavior, which the successful artist varies in some new way each day. The comic strip is indeed a little drama, as the name of C. Segar's original Popeye strip, *Thimble Theater*, implies.

Comic strips began to appear in the mid-nineteenth century in France and Germany, and soon were popular features in American newspapers. They evolved from earlier single-panel cartoons, which consisted mainly of political and social satire, a branch of cartooning that still flourishes in the editorial cartoons of the world's newspapers. An influential prototype was the work of the English painter William Hogarth, whose engravings portrayed current social ills in elaborate tableaus such as "Gin Lane" (1751), which pictures the evil influence of alcohol on the lower classes. Hogarth's successors, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson, brought broader humor and more extreme caricature to their satirical attacks, and in the nineteenth century the tradition was carried on by such memorable artists as George Cruikshank in England and Thomas Nast in America.

Meanwhile in newspapers and magazines cartoonists were ridiculing the follies of their day with less interest in correcting abuses than in eliciting chuckles. Toward the end of the nineteenth century such publications as *Punch* in England and *Puck* and *Frank Leslie's Budget of Fun* in America carried cartoons aimed at humor rather than reform. In the early part of this century the old *Life* (not the more recent pictorial news magazine) and *Judge* were favorites. Later came *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Playboy*, and many others, including most daily newspapers. Though some magazines have been devoted entirely to cartoons, most often

Caricature of Boss Tweed, leader of a corrupt political machine, by Thomas Nast.





Drawing by Phil May in an 1898 *Punch*, ridiculing lower class women putting on airs. The caption says "If I was you, I wouldn't 'ave anything to do with that Mrs. Smithers, I think she 'ain't respectable."

cartoons have been used as page turners, designed to entice readers to leaf through the magazine and notice the articles and advertisements. Of course each publication features cartoons slanted toward its readership. Girly jokes used to be standard fare in *Esquire*, dogs and house repairs in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

The single-panel cartoonist has no leisure to lay any groundwork, but must immediately establish a shared world-view with the reader. Many cartoons make this connection by referring to current preoccupations: hippie jokes in the late sixties; scarce gasoline a few years later; then in the eighties, yuppies, bankruptcies, and political correctness. Cartoons are truly (as Hamlet said of the traveling actors) the abstract and brief chronicles of the time. Often a cartoon will start from a cliché, a situation to which the reader brings a set of pre-established assumptions, and

work some new twist on it: there are whole literatures of husband-coming-home-drunk cartoons, employee-asking-for-a-raise cartoons, panhandler cartoons (like our honorable-mention selection by Rick Stromoski), and scores of others. Established cartoonists are able to evoke, through individual cartoons published over the years, their own familiar worlds. Charles Addams's gothic family in their eerie Victorian mansion became so popular that a television show was based on them. George Booth fans immediately recognize the squalid flat where a balding blowhard in the bathtub harangues his wife at the ironing board surrounded by neurotic cats; there is pleasure both in the recognition and in the discovery of the artist's latest variation on his theme.

But what is that nudge of our funny bone that makes a successful cartoon? It has been said that laughter is the human animal showing its teeth: humor usually contains an element of triumph over someone or something. Most cartoons make readers feel superior, giving us a pleasurable sense of complicity with the artist (sensible, in the know, with the right views) making fun of *them* (the foolish creatures in the cartoon). This sense of superiority, based on shared assumptions, is of course the basis of all satire, and much cartoon humor invites the reader to join with the artist in ridiculing some social behavior.

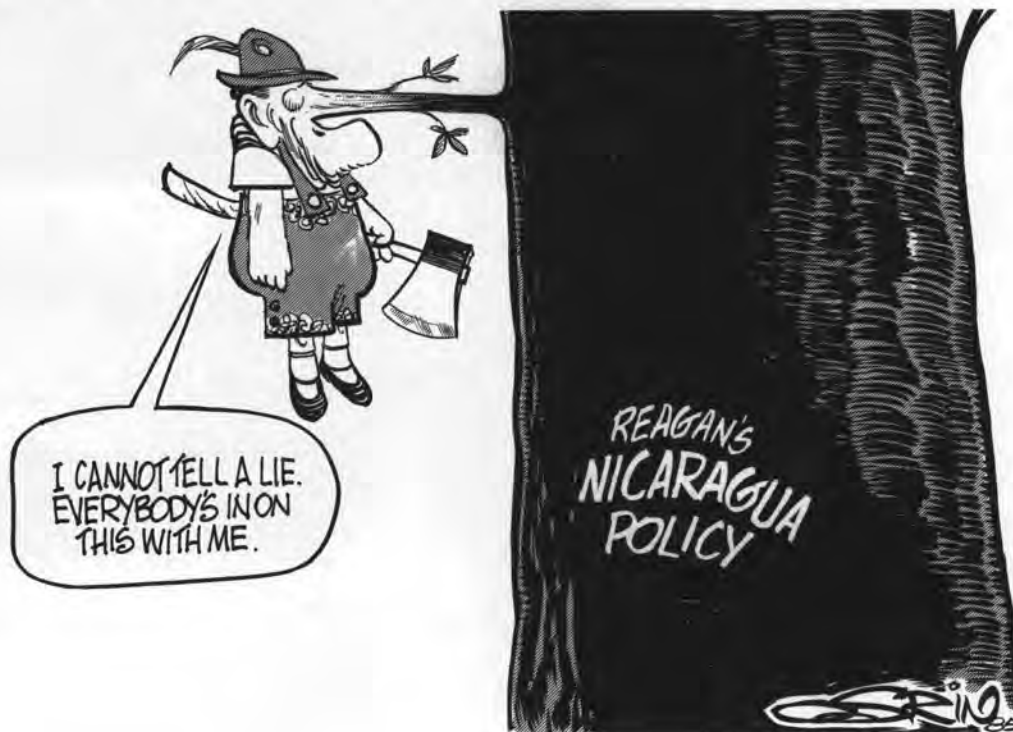
There is another kind of comic triumph which is not over any individual real or imagined but over the difficulty of art and the general confusion of life. We may feel a kind of vicarious pride in

sharing the artist's wit in a pun or in some clever analogy with an event from literature or history. For example, in the 1985 *Plain Dealer* cartoon by our expert judge Ray Osrin, some may no doubt enjoy seeing Ronald Reagan held to the fire, but the humor comes in the imaginative leap connecting the President to Pinocchio.

Finally, there is a vicarious pleasure in sheer rebellion. We secretly sympathize with the antics of Dennis the Menace or the exuberant malignity of Garfield. Some such latent rebelliousness no doubt accounts for the perennial popularity of Carl Rose's famous *New Yorker* cartoon of the little girl who, when her mother urges her to eat her broccoli, replies, "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it." We enjoy the mildly wicked complicity of laughing at jokes about sex, alcoholism, the law, Heaven, Hell, or the Bible—all frequent cartoon subjects. Burlesque—the treatment of a serious subject in a frivolous manner—is the general term for this socially acceptable safety-valve of disrespect. Burlesque is the heart of political cartoons, with their caricatures of presidents and other powerful people; the illustration by Osrin is a typical example.

The best humor breaks upon us unexpectedly. We expel our breath in a laugh of pleased surprise; it is perhaps a reflex of relief, recognition after a momentary disorientation—the adult equivalent of a baby's laughter at a sudden light or noise. A far-fetched pun or incongruous juxtaposition makes us sputter with delight.

1985 Plain Dealer cartoon
by Ray Osrin.



Gary Larson has the knack for blind-siding us with such far-out imaginings in *The Far Side* (e.g., a cocktail party of moray eels, labeled “social morays”).

Our third-place winner clearly caught our judges’ fancies with just such an outrageous pun. The drawing turns the double meaning of “flashers” into a ridiculous situation, and the dead-pan acceptance of the characters making the observation doubles the humor.

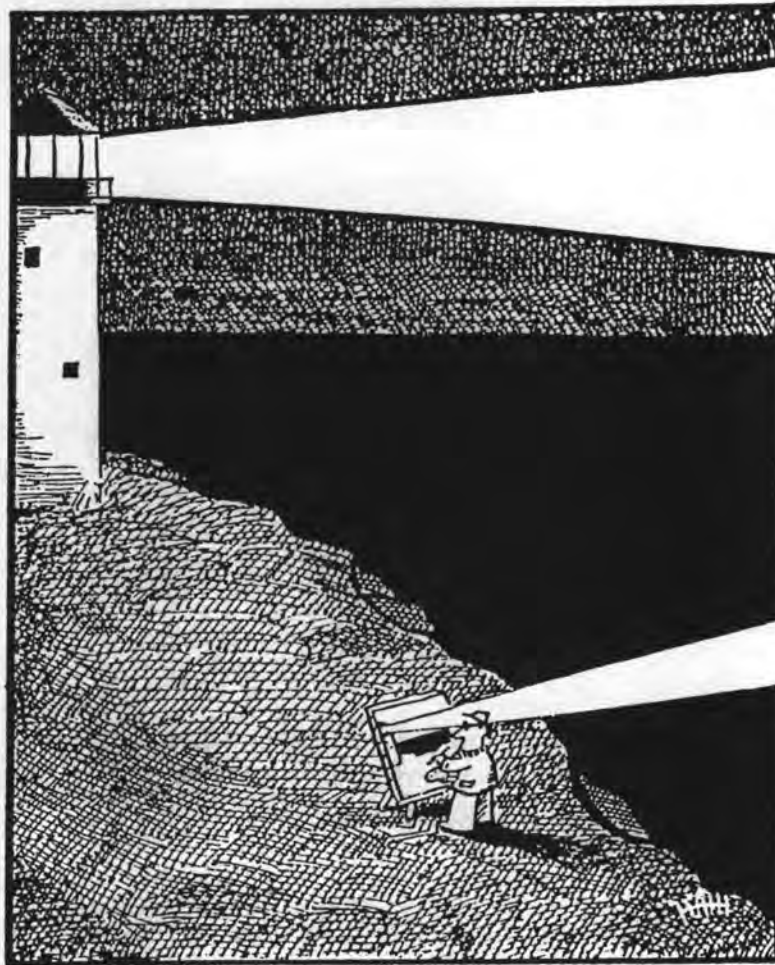
The second-prize winner burlesques a sacred subject, the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, so it makes us feel pleasantly—safely—rebellious. The situation surprises us by translating an ancient story incongruously into a modern setting (giving Cain a modern garden hoe is a nice touch). And it neatly calls our attention to—and ridicules—a current fad that has perhaps irritated some of us: the propensity to invent nicknames for acquaintances. So this cartoon appeals to us in several ways.

The first-place cartoon seems to have appealed to the judges by surprising and also by touching a metaphysical chord with its blurring of the border between art and reality. It is essentially a variation on a theme that appears in a number of paintings by René Magritte, where the subject of a painting becomes ambiguously a part of the real landscape.

The honorable mentions all had their supporters among the judges. Roy Delgado’s physician with the sign on his back combines two current social topics, the familiar signs on the backs of highway trucks, and the frequency of malpractice suits against doctors. I was charmed by Greg Nelson’s caterpillar at the class reunion—the classmate who never grew up. All of these cartoons testify to the fact that, while formulas and mechanical skill can carry the artist a considerable distance, in the end there also has to be the imaginative spark, the quantum leap of insight, by which this sudden art catches us readers off balance and captures our imaginations for its moment of triumph.

—*Leonard Trawick*

First Prize: Mark Heath



"I've always wanted to be a writer," says Mark Heath, "and I discovered that my best short stories were the length of a caption. I love to dream, I love to write—cartooning is the compromise. Also, it seemed a waste to abandon my signature which seemed destined for some form of art." Heath, who describes himself as "still anchored in New Hampshire," has worked in retail, at a cabinet factory, and as a motel clerk. Now, he writes about cartooning for Artist's magazine and sells cartoons and designs. Heath reads a lot of science fiction, fantasy, and science, and he plays jazz trumpet. His self-portrait is at the right.



Second Prize: Scott Mendenhall



**THE REAL REASON
CAIN KILLED ABEL**

"I've always been interested in cartooning," says Scott Mendenhall, "and making fun of life in general. Growing up (not that I fully have), I was a class clown in school and was always in trouble for drawing on the desks. Finally, in fourth grade, my homeroom teacher (Mr. Childress) gave me a sketchbook because he was tired of seeing me after class." Mendenhall, a native of Phoenix, Arizona, lives in University Heights, Ohio and works as a writer/illustrator at American Greetings. His work has appeared several times in King Features' New Breed showcase of America's best humorists. His card collection, "The Dis-oriented Express," will be coming out in the summer of 1993. Mendenhall received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in art from the University of Texas in 1984. He is interested in paleontology, anthropology, archaeology, camping, writing, and travel.

Third Prize: Sheila Forsyth and Margaret Hyland



Must be car trouble—they've got their flashers on.

"I enjoy making people laugh!" says Sheila Forsyth. "A few years ago, I started writing down ideas for what I thought would be good cartoons. I had rough drafts of what I wanted them to look like, and then asked my mother, Margaret Hyland, if she'd like to illustrate them. My mother and I are kindred spirits when it comes to humor! We have a great working relationship." Forsyth has lived most of her life in New York State. She has an art education degree from SUNY at New Paltz, lives in Fayetteville, New York, and works in a kindergarten. She is also putting together a cartoon book.

Margaret Hyland, Forsyth's mother and collaborator, received her B.F.A. in illustration from Syracuse University. She is a practicing artist, a former fashion illustrator, and a high school art teacher.

Honorable Mentions



Greg Nelson

SID...YOU OLD DEVIL!...YOU HAVN'T CHANGED A BIT!

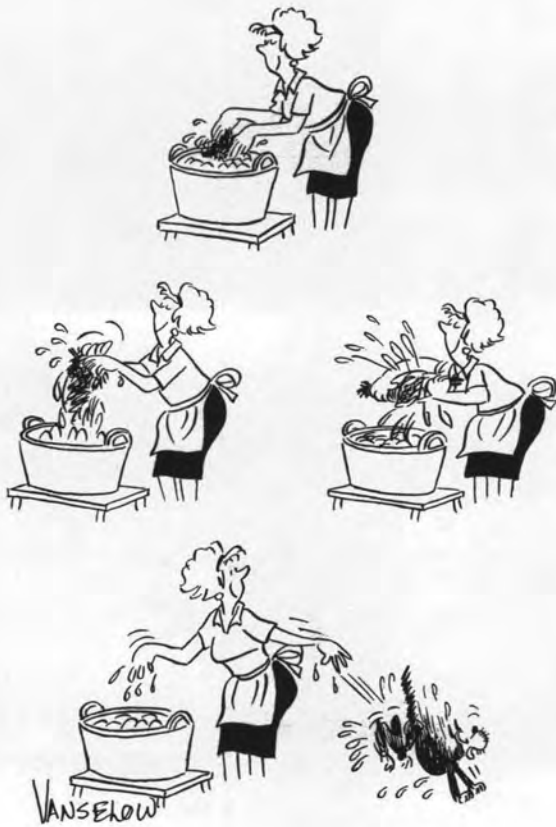
Jerry Fuchs



Rick Stromoski



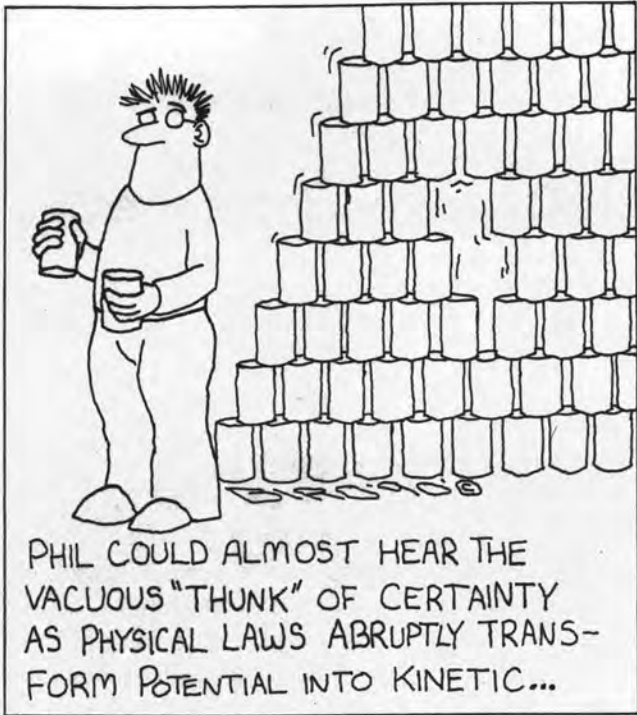
William A. Vanselow





Thomas L. Wojciechowicz





Bruce Biro

Roy Delgado



Roy Delgado

Economics

Inflation, Consumers, and the CPI

Louis T. Milic

Imagine yourself living in a land of really high inflation: for example, Peru before the advent of President Fujimori in 1990. Prices were rising at about 1000 percent a *month*. Someone with an income of 500 sols per month could buy a loaf of bread for one sol on January 1, but would have to pay 10 sols on February 1, 100 on March 1, and on April 1 would discover that his monthly wage bought only half of a loaf. Any consumer in that situation would not think of inflation as an abstract economic concept. No economy can long endure such ruinous events. The German hyperinflation of 1921-22 set records for the speed of increase of prices, destroyed the middle class, and eventually led to the accession of the Nazi government. Americans have never had to endure anything comparable. The double-digit inflation of the later Carter years (11.3% in 1979, 13.8 in 1980, and 12.2

in 1981), though not in the same category, was uncomfortable enough and has left an imprint on consumers' memories. So it is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that even an elementary acquaintance with the concepts of inflation, cost of living, purchasing power and indexing could be of great practical value to the consumer.

Inflation is defined by economists as an increase in the money supply relative to the quantity of goods available for purchase. To consumers, however, infla-



Examples of the German hyperinflation of 1922-23. Top: A billion mark note (actually, 1000 billion). Bottom: A postcard mailed in 1922 showing 6000 marks overprinted to 100,000 marks.



A roomful of money from the German hyperinflation of 1922-23.

tion refers to two separate effects: a rise in price and a decrease in the value of the currency, which are of course related. Inflation can be simply observed by contemplating coins made of precious metals: as inflation occurs, the currency loses value and either the size of the coins becomes smaller until they are too small to use or the precious metal is replaced by such base metals as copper, tin, or zinc, made to look like silver alloy.

We have only to look at the recent history of English gold coins to see this effect in action: the English gold sovereign (£1) contained 8 grains of 92% gold (1/60 troy ounce) from the time of Queen Victoria (1837) to the reign of George V, when the minting of such coins for circulation was discontinued (1927). One such coin in average condition now sells for \$200, about 100 times its face value. A few years ago, when England started minting gold again, it began with a five pound sterling coin (about eight U.S. dollars) weighing 40 grains (1/12 troy ounce) and sold it for \$1000, more than one hundred times face value. This illustrates the usefulness of gold as a measure of value and the continuous nature of inflation. At the moment, gold sells for \$400 a troy ounce, so a gold sovereign minted today would weigh two grains and be smaller than a collar button.

The more or less stable value of gold and the falling value of the nominal currency combine to make coins an indicator of inflation over the long term. Today's dollar coin contains no silver (the Susan B. Anthony was the last version, though a new one is under consideration) and will buy little more than a cup of coffee, whereas its

ancestor, the silver cartwheel, introduced in 1878, would have bought a whole meal complete with drinks. It is the sharp increase in the money supply that is responsible for the loss of purchasing power of the coins.

A similar progress has taken place in the life of the three-cent postage stamp, which delivered a first-class letter until July 31, 1958, and is now the twenty-nine cent stamp (a near tenfold increase). Calls made at pay phones for a nickel in 1925 now cost a quarter (a fivefold increase); and a New York subway ride that also cost a nickel when the subway opened in 1900 is now one dollar (a twentyfold increase). The variation in these increases is dependent on non-economic factors: the politics of public transport, the relation between cost and the availability of appropriate coins . . .

How does the consumer account for these changes in his economic life? Let us imagine that every taxpayer received a tax refund equivalent to one-half his income—we don't need to worry about a reason—many people would immediately buy some long-deferred purchase (car, refrigerator, computer, suit or dress). Shortages would soon occur and manufacturers and merchants would raise prices, putting the cycle in motion. The money supply in actuality does not rise so suddenly or so much at a time, but does so gradually, often because of new wage contracts or increases in demand for goods and services. At the moment of writing (April 1992), the money supply has dried up. People have lost their jobs, had to pay their creditors, and have adopted a dismal view of their economic future. As a result, inflation is under control and prices have largely stabilized and in the housing industry have even gone down.

In the nation's early days, wages remained fairly stable. An artisan could expect to earn between \$1.00 and \$2.00 a day during the period 1785-1830, depending on conditions and competition among workers. There would have been little point in trying to negotiate for higher wages. During that period, wages fluctuated within the range mentioned, but prices declined more or less steadily (Table 1) because of workers' increased productivity. When wages rise, however, without an accompanying increase in productivity, the increase in cost to the manufacturer is passed along in the form of higher prices to the consumer, and these eventually result in the expectation of higher wages by the worker who is also a consumer.

If we examine manufacturing wages during the early years of this century (Table 2), we have a clear view of this phenomenon. There is an uninterrupted rise in annual salary from \$487 in 1900 to \$1488 in 1930, the beginning of the Great Depression. Obviously

Table I
Consumer Price Index All Items
1800-1989 (1967=100)

1800	51	1810	47	1820	42	1830	32	1840	30	1850	25
1801	50	1811	50	1821	40	1831	32	1841	31	1851	25
1802	43	1812	51	1822	40	1832	30	1842	29	1852	25
1803	45	1813	58	1823	36	1833	29	1843	28	1853	25
1804	45	1814	63	1824	33	1834	30	1844	28	1854	27
1805	45	1815	55	1825	34	1835	31	1845	28	1855	28
1806	47	1816	51	1826	34	1836	33	1846	27	1856	27
1807	44	1817	48	1827	34	1837	34	1847	28	1857	28
1808	48	1818	46	1828	33	1838	32	1848	26	1858	26
1809	47	1819	46	1829	32	1839	32	1849	25	1859	27
1860	27	1870	38	1880	29	1890	27	1900	25	1910	28
1861	27	1871	36	1881	29	1891	27	1901	25	1911	28
1862	30	1872	36	1882	29	1892	27	1902	26	1912	29
1863	37	1873	36	1883	28	1893	27	1903	27	1913	30
1864	47	1874	34	1884	27	1894	26	1904	27	1914	30
1865	46	1875	33	1885	27	1895	25	1905	27	1915	30
1866	44	1876	32	1886	27	1896	25	1906	27	1916	33
1867	42	1877	32	1887	27	1897	25	1907	28	1917	38
1868	40	1878	29	1888	27	1898	25	1908	27	1918	45
1869	40	1879	28	1889	27	1899	25	1909	27	1919	52
1920	60	1930	50	1940	42	1950	72	1960	89	1970	116
1921	54	1931	46	1941	44	1951	78	1961	90	1971	121
1922	50	1932	40	1942	49	1952	80	1962	91	1972	125
1923	51	1933	39	1943	52	1953	80	1963	92	1973	133
1924	51	1934	40	1944	53	1954	80	1964	93	1974	148
1925	52	1935	41	1945	54	1955	80	1965	94	1975	161
1926	53	1936	42	1946	58	1956	81	1966	97	1976	170
1927	52	1937	43	1947	67	1957	84	1967	100	1977	182
1928	51	1938	42	1948	72	1958	87	1968	104	1978	195
1929	51	1939	42	1949	71	1959	87	1969	110	1979	217
1980	247	1982	289	1984	311	1986	328	1988	355		
1981	272	1983	298	1985	322	1987	340	1989	372		

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Table II
Average Annual Earnings Manufacturing
1901-1984 (Current dollars)

1901	\$487	1910	\$651	1920	\$1532	1930	\$1488	1940	\$1432
1902	511	1911	632	1921	1346	1931	1369	1941	1653
1903	537	1912	651	1922	1283	1932	1150	1942	2023
1904	548	1913	689	1923	1403	1933	1086	1943	2349
1905	538	1914	696	1924	1427	1934	1153	1944	2517
1906	561	1915	661	1925	1450	1935	1216	1945	2517
1907	577	1916	751	1926	1476	1936	1287	1946	2517
1908	589	1917	883	1927	1502	1937	1376	1947	2793
1909	548	1918	1107	1928	1534	1938	1296	1948	3038
		1919	1293	1929	1543	1939	1363	1949	3095
1950	\$3302	1960	\$5352	1970	\$8217	1980	\$17213		
1951	3608	1961	5507	1971	8766	1981	19629		
1952	3832	1962	5730	1972	9548	1982	20388		
1953	4053	1963	5920	1973	10224	1983	21887		
1954	4123	1964	6196	1974	10912	1984	23060		
1955	4356	1965	6389	1975	11777				
1956	4589	1966	6643	1976	12919				
1957	4786	1967	6880	1977	14129				
1958	4947	1968	7347	1978	15388				
1959	5221	1969	7775	1979	16622				

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wages rose to some extent in response to increased output by workers as factories became more efficient. Consequently their purchasing power increased. By the end of World War II, however, the inflationary spiral was in full swing, and both wages and prices were rising at an increasing rate. The Consumer Price Index (or CPI, the federal government's annual measure of prices) reached 391 in 1990, compared to 100 in 1967—an almost fourfold increase. In other words, it would take, on the

average, \$3.91 in 1990 to buy what a dollar would buy in 1967. Workers came to expect annual salary increases—by no means a normal expectation in a stable economic environment—to counter the loss of purchasing power due to inflation and became inured to constant price increases. During 1991, however, a period of recession, the annual rise in the CPI was a mere 2.7%, an amount of inflation generally considered equal to price stability.

The federal government, which could be compared to a combination bank and business—lending money, borrowing, keeping track of the accounts of its depositors—needs to keep a careful eye on the economy and therefore requires a consistent device for monitoring economic change. In 1917, the Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Board decided that a fair wage scale required raising wages when the cost of living went up. It requested the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor to devise an appropriate index. Beginning in 1919, the Bureau published semi-annual “cost of living” indexes, becoming quarterly in 1935 and monthly in 1940. Because the *cost of living* was discovered to be a nebulous notion based on an ideal standard of living, the index was renamed to reflect the measurable reality of *prices*.

Changes in consumer prices are equivalent to change in purchasing power (usually loss). The fabled Consumer Price Index is a

list of the most common goods and services supposedly representative of the expenditures of an average household, items such as food, housing, clothing, transportation (the so-called “market basket” which is re-priced monthly with changes noted).

Taking 1967 as a base (i.e., 100) Table 1 shows the Consumer Price Index for the years 1800 to 1989.* This index reflects the relative cost of things in the United States from year to year and thus to some extent the cost of living. From 1800 to the Civil War, prices declined steadily, reaching a level just over half what they were at the beginning of the century, except for a brief expansion during the war of 1812. The Civil War brought prices up to the level of 1800, but they declined again as the century ended, reaching the lowest level during the years 1895-1901. World War I and its aftermath brought prices up again and they reached a peak in 1920, after which they declined until the low point of the Depression in 1933, then rose as the nation entered World War II—wars have bad effects on prices. For a period of 140 years, prices hovered below the 50 level on that scale, but from 1942-43 the rise has been continuous. Having taken 167 years to go from 50 to 100, prices doubled again in only eleven years and nearly doubled again in the following decade. As this voyage through the Index reveals, the rise has been continuous only during the post-World War II period, which has also by and large been a period of more or less continuous prosperity for a large part of the population. And this economic climate has given shape to Americans' economic culture and expectations.

Barring a major depression or a significant decrease in the cost of production of energy, a factor that drives the CPI to a considerable degree because it infuses all stages of the nation's life, inflation seems certain to continue. How can consumers find a way to protect themselves against its corrosive effect? Those who have savings and place them in interest-bearing bank accounts can benefit only if the interest rates exceed the rate of inflation. When inflation was above 10% and savings banks paid 5%, the value of the account diminished by 5% each year. Now that inflation is at 2.7% and savings bank interest is at 4%, there is a net gain of 1.3%. But inflation does not affect everyone in the same way. The key to the puzzle lies in the makeup of the Consumer Price Index.

The CPI consists of a series of expenditure categories that the Bureau of Labor Statistics deems to be characteristic of all or most households. The major ones are: Food and Beverages, Housing, Apparel, Transportation, Medical Care, Entertainment, plus Other Goods and Services.

The most recent revision (1984) shows that the Bureau of Labor Statistics believes that a market basket of expenditures in the follow-

*As mentioned, there was no CPI before 1919, but price and wage data were available in a variety of compilations and the CPI was retrospectively calculated for the nineteenth century.

ing categories and quantities fairly represents the way that the average American family spends its income:

Food and beverages	17.7%
Housing	42.3
Apparel and upkeep	6.4
Transportation	17.2
Medical care	6.0
Entertainment	4.4
Other goods and services	6.0

The Index is very detailed. Food and beverages, the second largest category (17.76%), is subdivided as follows:

Food	16.19
Food at home	9.95
Cereals and bakery products	1.35
Meats, poultry, fish, eggs	2.95
Meats	2.09
Beef and veal	1.01
Pork	.65
Poultry	.49
Fish and seafood	.37
Eggs	.19
Dairy products	1.26
Fruits and vegetables	1.65
Fresh fruits and vegetables	1.02
Fresh fruits	.52
Apples	.10
Bananas	.06
Oranges	.07
Other	.28
Fresh vegetables	.50
Potatoes	.09
Lettuce	.06
Tomatoes	.08
Other	.27
Processed fruits and vegetables	.64
Other food at home	2.55
Sugar and sweets	.36
Fats and oils	.27
Non-alcoholic beverages	.89
Carbonated	.45
Coffee	.29
Other	.15

Other prepared food	1.04
Canned soup	.08
Frozen food	.19
Snacks	.22
Seasonings	.27
Misc. (incl. baby food)	.28
Food away from home	6.24
Lunch	2.19
Dinner	2.68
Other meals and snacks	1.04
Unpriced items	.32
Alcoholic beverages	1.57
Beverages at home	.87
Beer and ale	.45
Distilled spirits	.23
Wine	.19
Away from home	.70*

Housing includes mortgage payments or rent and housing costs like electricity, heating (4.2), and furniture (4.2). Transportation is today a considerable item, nearly one-third the cost of housing and about the equivalent of food and drink. Included in this category is the cost of buying a new car (4.0), based on the finding that Americans buy one every few years, fuel (4.0), repairs (1.5), and public transportation (1.6).

The Index indicates only the fluctuation of prices in the market basket; it does not reflect the amount spent even by an average family on each category of items in the table. A family with an annual income of \$35,000 or less may spend a fifth or more of it on food and another fifth on transportation, but even a family of gourmets with an annual income of \$350,000 will probably not spend \$1,350 a week for food, though it may just possibly spend ten percent (rather than forty) on housing, whereas its expenditures on non-category items (vacations, private schools, jewelry, collectibles) may well exceed what the Bureau of Labor Statistics contemplates. It is assumed by economists that such surplus income is either invested in income-producing equities or saved.

What undermines to some extent the reliability of the CPI as an indicator of changes in the economy as the consumer perceives them is first that it changes over time, forcing revisions in the market basket, so that, for example, the food part of the basket varies as customs, habits, spending priorities change. When public transportation was cheap, people walked, and only rich people had cars, the transportation component was not what it is today. Today's 17.2% for transportation reflects the cost of having the convenience of a private automobile. Over a period of decades the CPI actually illustrates the

*Long as it is, the list in this single category is not complete: more than half of the items have been omitted. The list is equally detailed for the other categories. The complete listing takes up 55 column-inches in six-point type.

improvement in the standard of living. The changes in the category allocations over several decades show this plainly:

	1935	1952	1963	1973
Food	35.4	32.2	25.2	20.4
Housing	33.7	33.5	34.9	39.8
Apparel	11.0	9.4	10.6	7.0
Transportation	8.1	11.3	14.0	19.8
Medical care	4.1	4.8	5.7	4.2
Entertainment	2.8	4.0	3.9	4.3
Personal care	2.5	2.1	2.8	1.8
Other	2.4	2.7	2.9	2.7

Since the Great Depression the food category has dropped to half of what it was, housing has risen, apparel declined steadily, transportation doubled, and medical care went up fifty percent. It would have undoubtedly gone higher except that a large part of the population now is covered by health insurance.

Economists do not rely on the CPI as a basis for the cost of living adjustments that form part of labor negotiations because of its upward bias. The CPI rises in part because the things and services being paid for are better than before and consumers want them, and that serves as the basis for a demand for higher wages, which simply increases inflation rather than helps workers overcome its effect. For that reason the automatic cost of living adjustments in pension and Social Security payments are lower than the nominal inflation rate as shown by the CPI.

Although changes in quality are taken into consideration by the compilers of the CPI, there is no means of taking into account the emergence of an invention that could not have been previously included. An example is the pocket calculator, not long ago unknown, now available everywhere at a constantly decreasing price. When such an item becomes a part of Other Goods (Personal and Educational Expenses), its decline in cost can become a factor, though when it was first introduced there was no place for it in the market basket. The typewriter is an example of a similar pattern of goods substitution. The mechanical typewriter became the electric typewriter, eventually reaching a cost of \$1000. When computers and electronic word-processors were introduced at comparable or greater prices, the rise in quality was noticeable and the decline in prices for general-purpose computers in 1980 dollars was steep. So by this process, the cost of a 1980 typewriter was reduced by half or more and one machine was replaced by a more versatile one, thus raising the standard of living while the CPI component declined.

When families were flush in the 1950s, they took brief vacations in their cars to places not too distant from their homes. As times

improved, the annual summer vacation became standard rather than special, thus displaying an improvement in the standard of living which was a non-negotiable demand in wage negotiations. In this way the inflationary trend masks an improvement in standard of living.

Moreover, the CPI is not a single index but a collection: annual, regional, monthly, demographic. The monthly publication of the Index by the Bureau of Labor Statistics distinguishes between the urban index (CPI-U) for the 80 percent of people who live in cities and the 32 percent of Wage and Clerical workers (CPI-W). The information is collected separately in each of 85 urban areas from 57,000 housing units and 19,000 retail stores, department stores, supermarkets, hospitals, filling stations, etc. Taxes are included in these reports. Prices are also analyzed by region, cities, and size of cities. For example, the cost of gasoline in October 1991 was \$1.30 in the largest cities in the Northeast, \$1.15 in the smallest metropolitan areas of the Midwest. The overall CPI-U for October 1991 was 137.4, but in the Northeast it was 143.7 compared to 134.1 in the South. In Houston it was 127.4, in New York City 143.0, in Los Angeles 138.5.*

* Based on 1982-84=100

It is obvious that one's location is an important factor in one's exposure to cost of living and inflation. The rural family in a town 500 miles from a city may not have access to a major museum or symphony orchestra, but it can grow its own vegetables and fruits or pay less for them and for other foods and ignore transportation, whereas the citizen of New York pays more for everything and is compensated by the expected superior quality of life.

From this one can infer that individual budget decisions can affect one's vulnerability to inflation: keeping a car longer—most will last a decade—using public transportation, eating at home, avoiding alcohol One's circumstances also make these averages inapplicable to any particular individual: older people may own their own homes, have all the clothes they need, eat out more often but frugally, and have higher medical expenses. Single men in the twenty-to-thirty age group have higher expenditures in all categories but medical care.

Moreover, category expenditures are not stable from year to year. Inflation capriciously alters rates of change. In successive annual periods, we find some interesting differences in the amount of rise from one year to another:

	1988 to 1989	1989 to 1990	1990 to 1991
Food	5.4	5.6	2.9
Housing	3.9	5.4	3.1
Apparel	4.4	5.7	3.3
Transportation	3.7	8.2	-1.4
Medical	7.0	9.3	8.1
Entertainment	4.8	4.9	4.6
Other	7.5	7.5	8.0

The above figures do not represent the *use* of these goods and services but their *cost*. That is, from 1988 to 1989, the cost of food rose over 5% and again during the following period, but it only rose about half that amount during the period closest to the present. The rise, as can be seen, was far from linear. The effect of increased fuel costs is clearly seen in the increase in the housing category and the more than double transportation percentage in the first two periods. Nothing explains the large increase in the medical category between 1989 and 1990 except possibly the nature of medical and hospital accounting and the fact that uncontrollable costs in this category had not yet produced a public outcry forcing action on government officials. The effect of the recession in the last period is plainly visible, especially in car prices.

What these fluctuations show is that though inflation may nowadays be constant in its tendency, it is variable and even capricious in its details. Although increases in the cost of fuel cannot be escaped except in part by the use of public transportation, consumers can make informed choices whose effect will be to blunt the effect of inflation. As tuition rises without visible limit, families can choose public colleges for their children; they can take different kinds of vacations and buy fewer and less expensive gifts. Consumers need no graduate course in economics to understand what lies behind the CPI and how their best interests are served by determining to what extent they are personally affected by inflation.

One can see now (April 1992), as the country tries to break out of a deep recession, that consumers have taken steps to protect themselves, by reducing credit purchases that expose them to high interest charges, increasing savings, and hoarding their liquid assets. The volume of requests for charitable donations is a sign of this economic situation, along with a drop in interest rates and a consequent reduction in inflation.

It would not be wise for consumers to confuse the change in the CPI with their own financial well-being, because the Bureau of Labor Statistics market basket is not that of any single family. If one were to choose a family at random and compare its expenditures to that of

the current CPI categories, one might find some wide disparities. By reducing expenditures in some categories, a family might have a larger income surplus (unexpended funds), which could be devoted to some future plan, investment, new house Another family, plagued by the need for medical care, might have to devote scarce funds to an expenditure category which shows a steady rise from year to year. To a great extent, a family determines the standard of living which is within its reach and accepts the inflationary consequences. Those who like Burgundy wine (which has been rising well beyond the index) with their dinner are not likely to decide on beer or whiskey, which have not shown any appreciable rise. If the Burgundy family is stricken by financial disaster, it may decide to give up any alcoholic accompaniment to its dinner.

Thus, although the effect of inflation can be mitigated by individual decision, to the extent that it affects the standard of living and its attendant quality of life, such decision will not be made voluntarily, without economic pressure or the threat of economic collapse, either within the family or in the region or nation. What the consumer can and ought to do is to be aware of the movement of the economy as reflected by the Index, because this movement is a significant portent of the nation's economic health and thus a direct influence on every individual family's budget.

If there were price stability in the nation, as there was in its early days (that is, if the CPI remained the same year after year), then any increase in income would be "real" rather than nominal, whether earned by greater effort, productivity, merit, or luck. Taxes, profits, and other economic activities would not have to be adjusted for inflation. "Constant dollars" would be the norm. That is the nostalgic paradise we can no longer hope to return to. □

Notes

The factual material in this article derives from these sources:

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The Sixties

Moody's Skidrow Beanery

The Beat Generation comes to the Midwest

Patrick Joseph O'Connor



▲ Patrick O'Connor, a native of Wichita, Kansas, recalls, "My first introduction to participative counterculture was at Moody's in 1965 when I was a high school student." O'Connor has an M.A. in communication and supports himself as a letter carrier. He is also a Folk Blues performer and writes fiction and essays. Some of his pieces have appeared in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Pig Iron Press*, and *Journal of the West* (forthcoming). He plans to chronicle the various aspects of Wichita's underground.

Social interaction is perhaps at its most productive in public yet intimate settings where open interchange of ideas is encouraged or at least tolerated. Taverns, cafés, and coffee houses have served this purpose over the centuries, particularly in Europe. In this country the "beat generation" in the 1950s and early 1960s helped populate many such hang-outs in New York and San Francisco, and even Wichita, Kansas, was briefly the site of a remarkable gathering place for free spirits, Moody's Skidrow Beanery. The Beanery, located downtown next to the tracks in this city of a quarter million, sought to serve hoboes and citizens down on their luck as well as members of the growing counterculture. Its rise and fall epitomizes one midwestern city's intolerance of mild nonconformity in its midst.

Wichita poet Charles Plymell coined the term "hobohemian" to describe the atmosphere and "social reality" of Moody's Beanery. Many of the patrons were, or tried to be, beats—the footloose, self-proclaimed outsiders who rejected American middle-class values and emulated the spirit of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957)—perhaps the quintessential document of the movement.

Harry T. Moore identifies the beats as a recent chapter in the long history of bohemianism, but complains that they lacked the gaiety and sense of mischief of their forerunners. Perhaps the unprecedented fear of nuclear annihilation contributed to their somber mood. John Clellon Holmes, author of the beat novel *Go*, wrote "A man is beat whenever he goes for broke and wagers the sum of his resources on a single number; and the young generation has done that continually." Beats opposed elitism and made a statement against conformity, even though their anti-conformist rhetoric and style of dress themselves established a model.

They had their own jargon, beginning with their name, which refers to their exhaustion from the restraints of American society,

their beatification from Zen Buddhism, and their involvement with the musical beat of cool jazz. Some beatnik terms are still familiar: *hip, cat, chick, pad, square, bread, dig, head, "like," "with it."* Like all argots, theirs helped keep them distinct from the masses and underscored their heightened awareness.

The oral reading of poetry allowed the beats to claim that they had returned to the original poetic culture of the rhapsodes, scops, and bards. They were categorized as anti-intellectual by the poets of academia. A number of magazines—*Big Table, Dissent, Evergreen Review*—came into being to explore this new literature. "All of them featured creative over critical writing, reversing the formula that was well established by then in the university quarterlies" (Cook 99).

National publicity came to the beats in 1956 with the publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*, which drew an obscenity suit. The newspapers and magazines began to pay attention to this odd assortment of folk who practiced "disengagement and disaffiliation" (Parry 388). Their actions were thought strange and psychotic by hard-working, middle-class Americans.

In an article that appeared in *Life* in 1959, Paul O'Neil analyzed the current beat activity. An accompanying photo showed models dressed in black and wearing sandals, with props that included espresso coffee, marijuana, and bongo and guitar for accompanying poetry readings. O'Neil asserted that

Beat philosophy seems calculated to offend the whole population. The industrious square [in the beats' view] . . . is a tragic sap who spends all the juice and energies of life in stultifying submission to the "rat race" and does so, furthermore, with no more reward than sexual enslavement by a matriarchy of stern and grasping wives and the certainty of atomic death for his children.

On the other hand, the beats themselves are "talkers, loafers, passive little con men . . . writers who cannot write, painters who cannot paint." O'Neil obviously slanted his story for mainstream America, siding with their repugnance, yet capitalizing on their fascination. But he also performed an important service by pointing out the dearth of other iconoclastic movements and hinting that at least the beats were correct to raise issues, and by crediting a few writers associated with the movement—William Burroughs, Norman Mailer—with true talent.

In December of 1959 a series of raids on New York city beatnik joints resulted in hundreds of arrests for drugs, marijuana to heroin. This further served to sully the beats' image with the public. Robbie



Jack Kerouac's On the Road was perhaps the quintessential document of the movement.



Moody Connell at the Skidrow Beanery. Photo courtesy of the Wichita Eagle. Photographer: Charles Rollins.

Wolliver, in his book on Gerdes Folk City in Greenwich Village, wrote, “The beats turned neighborhood cafes into smoky dens of jazz, folk, and poetry.” While the beats’ affinity for folk songs is suspect, public perception put the guitar into the beatniks’ hands and the music of the commonality into their haunts.

No large city was without its seasoning of beatniks, not even the heart of the heartland, Wichita, Kansas, where in January 1963, Moody Connell took over the Mission Snack Bar from two men who owed him \$350.00. Connell had run Moody’s Swap Shop at the same location, 625 E. Douglas, downtown Wichita, in a run-down block that held the Salvation Army and Okie’s Tavern, near the main railroad tracks.

A few months later, Connell changed the name to Moody’s Skidrow Beanery. His flair for confrontation and the dramatic put him in the sights of the media, particularly the newspapers. The *Wichita Eagle* and *Beacon’s* combined offices were on Douglas only two blocks away. The newspaper reported Connell’s plan to mix the two cultures of hoboes and beatniks. He wanted to install a book store called Socrates’ Square, with booths for customers of all religious faiths, free from pressure to convert.

“Men don’t like a mission. They don’t trust a mission. Every time they go to a different mission to spend the night, they’ve got to be converted all over again.”

A sign in the Beanery read: “Through our doors walk the finest bums on earth—our customers.” The menu at the time was:

- Okie T-bone (toast and creamed gravy)—15¢
- Pea-farm [prison farm] Steak (baloney, fries, onion, bread, and beans)—25¢
- Jail House Chili—25¢

The fare was popular among the hoboes and low-income crowd. “Beans is the main deal, though,” Jim Anderson, a cook at Moody’s, pointed out. “It comes with everything you get.”

Moody’s was housed in a deep, narrow building with patterned ceilings built in the first decade of this century. It was furnished with straight-back wooden chairs, tile floors, and faded colors. Socrates’ Square held a few booths, two sofas, and an old piano. The walls were



Connell checking acoustics in the back room. Photo courtesy of the Wichita Eagle. Photographer: Charles Rollins.

shedding plaster, the lighting was poor, and there was little ventilation. The *Wichita Beacon* noted that a little monkey had the run of the place. Connell complained that the city was creating difficulties for him with constant inspections. "They want to make Wichita as unattractive for bums as possible," he said.

One month after the Beanery began to offer beats a place to read, Connell was told by police, regular visitors there, that he must take down a painting on the wall and beware of selling poetry books by such authors as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Charles Plymell that police officers labeled "obscene trash."

The police chief said he was concerned about juveniles who attended some of the poetry and music sessions. A 17-year-old and a 15-year-old were found at the back room of the Beanery and taken to Juvenile Hall until their parents could retrieve them. The youths were cautioned against going to such places in the future. City attorneys examined the books in Socrates' Square to determine whether they were legally obscene.

Despite the pressure, new drawings kept appearing on the walls and there was no shortage of poetry readers and guitarists. In a not-too-serious effort to meet police objections, Connell pasted pieces of paper marked "censored" over objectionable parts of the wall paintings.

A letter to the editor of the *Wichita Beacon* (April, 8, 1964) supported the beatnik philosophy of the owner:

How long have the police officers been studying to be art and poetry critics? . . .

I suppose the police would like for us to go to local bars and get drunk instead of frequenting Moody's where no alcoholic beverages are allowed. Down at Moody's you can take a deep breath without being afraid of someone coming up behind you and telling you that that just isn't the proper thing to do . . .

The only trouble there has been at Moody's is what trouble the police have created. . . . Where else in the city can we go and hear good folk music, good poetry, and release our own thoughts and feelings without fear . . . ?

We are a new generation and it will take more than the police to cut us down.

Nonetheless, the Skidrow Beanery was closed for 37 violations of fire and health codes in May 1964. These included: rough floors, narrow doors, improperly constructed balcony, same toilet facility for



Allen Ginsberg, shown here in a 1967 photo, was one of the authors whose works were considered obscene by the police.



Charles Plymell was a local poet who wrote about Wichita's beat experience.

both sexes, faulty electrical wiring. The balcony, overlooking the back room, was used by declaiming poets.

In order to reopen the Beanery, Connell contracted for renovations, but almost at once he found himself in court, pleading not guilty to a charge of failing to remove a fire hazard. He had been arrested for loading rubbish, resulting from the renovation, onto a truck. He was found not guilty because the city had failed to prove it had given him 48 hours' written notice of the fire hazard.

The Skidrow Beanery reopened nine months after being closed, after \$2000.00 worth of repairs had gone into it. The wall art was gone but the poetry readings and the folk music continued.

Moody Connell later recalled those times. "I had a lot of publicity. I was running ice cream trucks during the summer. I had 19 of them. The beatniks kind of took over the place from the hoboes. That's when the police started coming in. Charlie Plymell was a hero to the college kids. He would come in dressed up like a lord of England."

Plymell, a local poet who wrote about Wichita's beat experience, called Moody's "a flophouse and beanery which was a personal Goodwill Industries complete with ice cream wagons if you wanted to earn your beans." Plymell took Connell on a visit to San Francisco. Connell reported, "There was a club of people out there who used to live in Wichita. I met Ferlinghetti. He was all right. The rest of those characters were a little too far out for me."

James Mechem, a Wichita writer and publisher of several small magazines, was one of the regulars at the Beanery. "Charlie [Plymell]," he recalls, "came into the cafe Moody had. He talked him into opening the room in the back for poetry readings and a little book store. Charlie brought in a magazine called *Fuck You*."

"I went in one afternoon—anyone could walk in and read—and went into the back and got up on the balcony. Somebody was playing the guitar but there wasn't much of an audience. I started to read from my novel, *Dream of Juno*. A few people would come in and listen for a while. I ended up reading all afternoon and finished it.

"First the bums had the Beanery, then the beatniks, then the college kids came in, and finally high school kids took it over."

Far from being mere disillusioned drop-outs, the beats provided a new outlet for activists of the 1950s and 1960s. They opened the performance of poetry and fiction to writers and their audiences who

had become impatient with the academic version of creativity. Fellow beats were encouraged to compose, to give vent to their feelings in the structure of poetry and art, to use the open readings as a forum.

The media gleefully reported these antics, and as a result the beatniks (a derogatory term initially) became part of the popular culture. Their disillusionment with society and their anti-materialism were not lost on many young people growing up in the 1950s. While the beats treasured the erratic and discordant strains of cool jazz, another type of music, folk songs, returned to favor during the latter part of the decade.

Wichita in 1964 and 1965 was a small Midwestern city isolated geographically—the nearest cities of similar size, Kansas City and Oklahoma City, were around 200 miles away. This allowed Wichita to develop its own versions of the cultural phenomena overtaking the coastal cities. Wichita had long known of beatniks. Folk music was on the radio and television. When it came time for the city to offer similar entertainments, two men, Charles Plymell, a beat poet, and Moody Connell, an ice cream truck entrepreneur, emerged with their plains version. The Skidrow Beanery served two groups of the dispossessed: the hoboes and the folk poets and singers who flouted mainstream America. Mainstream America reacted accordingly, first attempting to censor the Beanery and then shutting it down. Connell tried to tread the narrow line between popularity and police harassment, but in January 1966 he gave up: "I finally had to close the Beanery. I lost \$3000.00 a year." □

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A park is located on the former site of the Beanery.



Law

The Supreme Court's First Decade

Pioneers of a strong federal judiciary



▲ *Richard L. Mattis lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and is employed as a computer facility manager at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. When asked about this article he explained, "I got caught up in the 200th anniversary dates of our Constitution and related events." Mattis is now working on a book about Henry E. Baker, a patent examiner and promoter of Black capitalism in Washington, D.C. at the turn of the century, who identified hundreds of African-American inventors and rescued their names and inventions from oblivion.*

Richard L. Mattis

The justices of the United States Supreme Court bear one of the weightiest responsibilities in public life, that of interpreting our Constitution. Today a seat on the Court is considered the apex of a legal career. Once on the bench, a justice seldom leaves before declining health or some pressing contingency requires it.

But it was not always so. Because the Constitution ratified in 1788 was vague about the Court's enforcement powers and even about the number of justices, it suffered from a low profile and low prestige. The first Chief Justice, John Jay, soon found the job "intolerable." He considered running for governor of New York because "almost any other office of a suitable rank and emolument was preferable."¹

The Court met twice a year in the capital and the justices travelled to it from their homes in the various states, an arduous trek at that time, especially for men of advancing years. On some occasions, the journey was in vain because there were no cases on the docket. In addition, the justices were assigned circuits to which they were expected to travel and hear local cases. Popular opinion about the Court was mixed; some justices longed for the esteem they had enjoyed as public figures in their home states, but relinquished when they accepted their new positions.

In its early years, the Supreme Court, being a unique institution, was compelled to assert itself and define its role in the new country. Despite a slow start and some unhappy justices, the Court accomplished much in its early years. It stood up for the principle of separation of powers and for the supremacy of federal over state laws. It defined the strictly judicial role of the federal courts. The achievements of the Court began well before the appointment in 1801 of the fourth Chief Justice, John Marshall, who is generally credited with shaping the Court in its present form.

The American people in 1789 were not sure they even wanted federal courts. The idea evoked memories of England's Privy

Council, the body that reviewed all measures passed by the colonial legislatures. By one count, the council had examined 8,563 colonial laws and had disallowed 469 of them.

To guard against such interference with the popular will, all the early state constitutions made the courts subject to the state legislatures in some manner. In 1786, for example, when state judges in Rhode Island declared a state law dealing with paper money unconstitutional, the governor summoned them before a special session of the legislature. A motion to impeach the judges failed, but at the next annual judicial election, the legislators replaced four of these judges.

Under the Articles of Confederation, which governed the new country before the Constitution was ratified, the federal judiciary was limited in scope. By authority of Article IX, Congress did establish federal courts "for the trial of piracies and felonies committed on the high seas and . . . for receiving and determining finally appeals in all cases of captures [of ships]."² Committees of Congress also settled disputes between states over boundaries. But these courts and committees had no way to enforce their decisions. Pennsylvania simply ignored a judgment it disagreed with regarding the disposition of a ship and its cargo.

Some states passed laws making it harder for British creditors to collect from American debtors. George Washington lamented that under the Articles of Confederation "thirteen sovereign, independent, disunited states" were creating a national embarrassment by passing such laws in violation of the terms of the peace treaty with England.³ Alexander Hamilton later observed that the lack of an independent judiciary "crowns the defects" of government under the Articles.⁴

Many of the delegates at the Great Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 recognized that the nation needed a stronger federal judiciary. Yet they could not agree on the details. Article III of the Constitution created the Supreme Court and specified the types of cases which should come under the jurisdiction of the federal courts.* It also indicated when the Supreme Court should have original jurisdiction and when it should have appellate jurisdiction. But the Convention left it to Congress to create the "inferior courts," to decide how many judges each court should have, and to specify more fully the jurisdiction and nature of the federal courts.

After the Constitution was ratified, the new Congress went to work. The Senate debated for seventeen days with "much wrangling about words" over whether there should be district courts.⁵ William Maclay of Pennsylvania feared that the proposed law would "draw by degrees all law business into the Federal Courts" and "swallow . . . the State judiciaries."⁶

*"The judicial Power shall extend to all Cases, in Law and Equity, arising under this Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and Treaties made, or which shall be made, under their Authority;—to all Cases affecting Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls;—to all Cases of admiralty and maritime Jurisdiction;—to Controversies to which the United States shall be a Party;—to Controversies between two or more States;—between a State and Citizens of another State;—between Citizens of different States,—between Citizens of the same State claiming Lands under Grants of different States, and between a State, or the Citizens thereof, and foreign States, Citizens or Subjects."

—Article III, Section 2, Paragraph (1) of the U.S. Constitution.

The House offered four amendments. One of these stipulated that federal juries “be formed according to the laws of each state respectively.”⁷ The bill that emerged was the Judiciary Act of 1789, signed by President Washington on September 24, 1789. This act provided for a chief justice of the Supreme Court and five associate justices. The Court was to meet in the capital on the first Mondays in February and August. The act created thirteen district courts and divided these among three circuits: eastern (more accurately, northern), middle, and southern.

The district courts, each with a federally appointed judge, had jurisdiction over violations of federal law for which the punishment was no more than thirty lashes, a hundred-dollar fine, or six months in jail. The circuit courts, which handled more serious cases, were not given their own judges. Rather, two Supreme Court justices were assigned to each circuit. Each pair of justices travelled twice yearly to the district courts within their circuit. They and the district court judge formed a three-judge circuit court.

First Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay (1745-1829). From the painting by Chappel.



The day that the act was passed, President Washington sent six nominations for Supreme Court justice to the Senate. The Senate confirmed them two days later. Washington chose John Jay of New York as Chief Justice. Jay had been delegate to the First and Second Continental Congresses, chief justice of the supreme court of New York, and secretary of foreign affairs under the Articles of Confederation.

James Wilson of Pennsylvania had nominated himself as Chief Justice but gracefully accepted appointment as associate justice. He had served on the committee of Congress that heard appeals from state admiralty courts. He had a brilliant legal mind; one writer considered his contributions at the Constitutional Convention second only to those of James Madison.

John Rutledge of South Carolina would also have preferred to be Chief Justice. He had served in the Second Continental Congress, was twice elected chief executive of his state, and was chief judge of its court of chancery. Under the Articles of Confederation, he was twice asked to serve on a court to settle a boundary dispute between states. Both times he

declined.

John Blair, Jr., had held prestigious judicial appointments in Virginia before attending the Constitutional Convention and the state

ratifying convention. When Washington nominated him he was one of five judges of the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia.

William Cushing of Massachusetts was the oldest of the six appointees but the one who served the longest. He was a well-connected man of modest means and intellect. He had been unsuccessful in private law practice, but he eventually became chief judge of his state's supreme judicial council. He once faced down an angry mob at a courthouse in Springfield.

The final nominee was Robert Hanson Harrison, chief judge of the General Court of Maryland. Five days after his confirmation, Harrison was chosen chancellor of his state. He became the first justice to resign from the Court. Washington appointed James Iredell in Harrison's place. He had served briefly on the Superior Court of North Carolina. He had led the fight for ratification of the federal Constitution in his state against determined opposition. His appointment came too late for him to attend the Court's first session.

The first session was scheduled to begin on February 1, 1790. Justices gathered at the Royal Exchange in New York City. The unflattering attention given to his judicial wig by a group of boys and a sailor convinced Justice Cushing not to wear it after that first day. The courtroom itself was "uncommonly crowded" with spectators, who were taken by "the elegance, gravity and neatness" of the robed justices.⁸ With only Jay, Wilson, and Cushing present, a quorum was lacking. The Court adjourned until the next day. By then Blair and Attorney General Edmund Randolph had arrived, so work could begin. During their nine-day session, the justices considered administrative matters but heard no actual cases. It would take time for cases to reach the Court on appeal. The Court appointed Richard Wenman crier and John Tucker clerk. It admitted nineteen attorneys to practice before its bar. The justices also decided their initial circuit assignments.

The August session lasted only two days. The justices made their initial circuit assignments permanent. This especially displeased Justice Iredell, whose beat was the extensive southern circuit.

In 1791, Philadelphia became the capital. The Court

Old City Hall in Philadelphia. The Supreme Court met here from August 1791 through February 1800. The building lies just east of Independence Hall. Illustration from the Library of Congress.



held a two-day February session in the State House, now known as Independence Hall. After that, Old City Hall housed the Court until it moved to Washington in 1800. In the August 1791 session, a case came before the Court which involved the same paper money law that judges in Rhode Island had held to be invalid in 1786. The case came to the Court through a writ of error issued by the clerk of the circuit court in that state. The justices dismissed the case, ruling that a writ of error could only be issued by the clerk of the Supreme Court.

Although the justices had mostly administrative work to do, they wanted at least to do it with the utmost impartiality. Attorneys in Philadelphia expected the Court to waive the formal requirements for admission to its bar on the basis of their acquaintance with Justice Wilson. Wilson declined them this favor, however. The mortified attorneys left but returned later in the day with the proper credentials. They all were admitted, but some wished that they had "been treated with a little more delicacy by a Gentleman [Wilson] who knew them all intimately."⁹

In March of that year, John Rutledge resigned from the Court to become chief justice of the South Carolina Court of Common Pleas. He cited the burden of circuit riding and the inactivity of the Court. He was also piqued that Washington had chosen Jay rather than him as chief justice. Rutledge had never attended a session of the Court.

The President's first two choices for a replacement for Rutledge declined. Thomas Johnson of Maryland accepted. Johnson had served three terms as governor and a year as chief judge of the General Court of Maryland. He and Washington had started the Potomac Company to promote navigation on the Potomac River. Johnson accepted with the President's assurance that changes in the circuit system were near.

Circuit riding was wearing on the justices. William Cushing found a horse and saddle less comfortable than the phaeton carriage he had ridden on his circuit in Massachusetts. On June 18, 1790, James Iredell wrote to his wife that apart from hot weather his southern odyssey was "a jaunt of pleasure, for I have been everywhere received by everybody, with the utmost kindness."¹⁰ But by March 1792, he had complained to Jay about the dangers to his health of the exhausting journeys, lobbied a senator for rotated circuit assignments, and offered \$500 of his \$3500 annual salary to pay for permanent circuit court judges.

Jay wrote back: "The circuits press hard upon us all."¹¹ Both Jay and Washington asked Congress for changes. Many in Congress preferred that the justices leave the capital and become aware of local opinion and state law. Nevertheless, on April 13, 1792, the lawmakers did provide for circuit assignments based on a rotation scheme.

In January 1793, a dissatisfied Thomas Johnson resigned from the Court after serving for only fourteen months. The rotation of circuit assignments was working imperfectly; senior justices seemed to draw preferred assignments. Two months later, Congress halved the burden by requiring only one justice to attend circuit court sessions.

Around this time, the first matter having constitutional implications came before the justices as they rode their circuits. The Hayburn Case—it was not a “case” in the usual sense—arose from a law enacted on March 23 of that year. The law directed circuit court judges to rule on the pension claims of Revolutionary War veterans. The veterans could appeal the judges’ decisions to the Secretary of War and to Congress.

The justices in each circuit (except the ailing Johnson) expressed concern about the law in letters to President Washington. They noted that the Constitution nowhere authorized any extra-judicial functions for federal judges, and that no decision by a federal judge could properly be subject to review by either of the other two branches, a crucial element in the function of the Supreme Court. Justices in the eastern and southern circuits performed the stated duty despite their objections. Wilson and Blair, sitting in Philadelphia, refused.

An incensed Attorney General Randolph claimed superintendency over the federal courts under section 35 of the Judiciary Act. He asked the Supreme Court for a mandamus to compel the Circuit Court for the Pennsylvania District to rule on the pension claim of William Hayburn. Before the Supreme Court could hear the case, Congress changed the law and broke the impasse. The justices had scored the first point for an independent judiciary.

In June 1792, a circuit court heard a case involving a Rhode Island law that granted a three-year extension for repayment of certain debts. The circuit court ruled that the statute, being a “Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts,” violated Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution. This case of *Champion and Dickason v. Casey* declared that the laws of the states must conform to the federal Constitution.¹²

After these two victories, the Court was stung by the backlash from a highly unpopular decision in 1793 in the case of *Chisholm v. Georgia*. Two citizens of South Carolina brought suit against the state of Georgia to recover a debt. Article III of the Constitution gave the Supreme Court jurisdiction over suits “between a State and Citizens of another State.” People had assumed, however, that this clause did not permit a citizen of one state to sue another state. Indeed, the federalists had so argued while pressing for ratification of the Constitution.

On February 18, 1793, the justices read their individual opinions in reverse order of seniority as was their custom. The judgment went against Georgia by 5-1, with only Justice Iredell dissenting. Plaintiffs quickly filed similar suits against four other states. The proponents of state sovereignty were concerned. One writer warned that “the absorption of the State governments” was the unstated goal of “certain influential characters in this country who are aiming gradually at monarchy.”¹³ The day after the decision, a resolution was introduced in the House of Representatives for a constitutional amendment. On January 8, 1798, the eleventh amendment, disallowing suits by a citizen of a state against another state, was ratified.

Shortly after the *Chisholm* decision, the news that England and France were at war reached America. Pro-British and pro-French sympathies divided the nation. Washington was determined to avoid involvement; he issued his Neutrality Proclamation on April 22, 1793. Three months later, the President formulated twenty-nine questions on neutrality and international law and sent them to the justices.

Jay consulted his colleagues and replied on August 8. He pointed to “the lines of separation drawn by the Constitution between the three departments of the government.”¹⁴ He politely reminded the President that the Constitution had established a cabinet of advisers for aid in such matters. In declining to give its opinion, the Court emphasized that its authority applied only to those specific cases and controversies that came before it.

The Court canceled its summer session in 1793 because of a yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia. When it convened the following February, William Paterson of New Jersey took Thomas Johnson’s seat. As a senator, Paterson had been one of the authors of the Judiciary Act of 1789.

In that session, the Court heard the important case of *Glass v. Sloop Betsy*. While war raged between England and France, French minister Edmond Genêt commissioned privateers in American port cities which captured neutral ships, sometimes in American territorial waters, and brought them back to port. The French had set up admiralty courts in the American ports to decide the fate of these captured ships and cargoes. A district court in Maryland had already heard *Glass* and ruled that the matter was outside its jurisdiction.

The government immediately appealed to the Supreme Court. The justices ruled that the district court in Maryland did have the authority to hear the case. The Court further stated that any matters relating to capture came under the jurisdiction of the courts of the United States. Neither France nor any other nation had authority to set up an admiralty court in this country. In the words of legal historian Charles Warren, “No decision of the Court ever did more

to . . . establish respect amongst other nations for the sovereignty of this country."¹⁵

In April, Washington sent Chief Justice Jay to England to negotiate a treaty. In his absence, Jay was elected governor of New York. He resigned from the Court upon his return in 1795.

John Rutledge wrote to the President and offered to fill the post. Since the Senate would not convene again until December 15th and no executive nomination for an important office had been rejected so far, Washington offered Rutledge the position telling him that a formal commission from the secretary of state would follow and asking him to preside over the summer session. The former associate justice led the August 1795 session of the Court. However, on July 16 in Charleston, he had made a speech in which he attacked Jay's treaty. Historians debate whether Rutledge gave this speech before or after he learned of his appointment as chief justice. The speech angered northern federalists. Stories of Rutledge's occasional attacks of mental derangement were also surfacing. The Senate rejected his nomination. When Rutledge heard this, he tried to drown himself. He spent his remaining five years as a recluse.

Washington asked Patrick Henry and later Justice Cushing to serve as Chief Justice. Both declined. The post went to Oliver Ellsworth, a senator from Connecticut who with Paterson had written the Judiciary Act of 1789. Ellsworth served for only three years. Justice Blair found his chronic headaches becoming longer and more frequent. These and the death of his wife led him to resign from the Court early in 1796. Samuel Chase, Chief Justice of the General Court of Maryland, succeeded him.

In February 1796, the Court heard *Ware v. Hylton*, a case involving a conflict between a state law and the 1783 peace treaty with England. The two countries had agreed "that creditors on either side shall meet with no lawful impediment to the recovery of the full value in sterling money of all bona fide debts heretofore contracted."¹⁶ The case arose from a Virginia law which permitted its citizens to make paper money payments to the state in lieu of specie payments on the \$2 million they owed to British creditors.

John Marshall, attorney for the debtors, argued that Congress had no power to make a treaty which nullified a state law. Four of the five justices present disagreed and concluded that the provisions of a treaty overrode the laws of any state. Only Justice Iredell dissented,



John Rutledge

John Rutledge (1739-1800) of South Carolina, second Chief Justice of the United States. Although he heard cases and issued opinions in the August 1795 session, his tenure ended abruptly when the Senate rejected his nomination. Illustration from the Library of Congress.



John Marshall (1755-1835).
Appointed Chief Justice in
1801, Marshall served for the
next 34 years.

showing the concern for states' rights he had voiced in *Chisholm*. Thus the Court finally declared illegal what had grieved George Washington ten years earlier.

By 1796 only three of the justices who had served since the Court's first year, Cushing, Iredell, and Wilson, were still on the bench. William Cushing could not afford retirement and served until his death in 1810 though he wrote only nineteen opinions during his long tenure. James Iredell served until near his death in 1799. Dealings in land speculation clouded James Wilson's later years, and he twice landed in jail. Declining health, malaria, and a stroke preceded his death in 1798.

Despite its early problems, in the first years of its existence the Court had established the supremacy of the Constitution and of federal treaties over state laws and maintained the independence of the judicial branch. It had stood up to the President, the Congress, and a foreign government. It had declined the role of adviser and confined its scope to the judgment of actual cases. By the time John Marshall was appointed Chief Justice in 1801, the Court had already acquired a semblance of the dignity and power it would consolidate during his 34-year tenure, and that characterize it today.

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¹Letter of Egbert Benson to Rufus King, December 18, 1793, quoted in Charles Warren, *The Supreme Court in United States History*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), 1:89. This book (not the quoted letter) is hereinafter cited as Warren.

- ²"Articles of Confederation," *American Historical Documents*, an unnumbered volume of *The Harvard Classics*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1938), 162.
- ³Letter of George Washington to John Jay dated August 1, 1786, reproduced in *The Annals of America*, vol. 3, 64-65.
- ⁴Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist, No. 22," December 14, 1787, in *The American Constitution: For and Against*, ed. J.R. Pole (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 167-168.
- ⁵Carson, 1:129.
- ⁶Carson, 1:133.
- ⁷Goebel, 1:506.
- ⁸Warren, 1:46 and 48.
- ⁹Letter from Edward Burd to Jasper Yeates, February 8, 1791, quoted in Warren, 1:55.
- ¹⁰Letter of James Iredell to Mrs. Iredell, written from Wilmington, North Carolina, June 18, 1790, in Griffith J. McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell, One of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1857-1858), 2:291.
- ¹¹Letter of John Jay to James Iredell, March 16, 1791, quoted in footnote of McRee, 2:321.
- ¹²Goebel, 1:589.
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- ¹⁵Warren, 1:115-117.
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Printing

Incunabula

Dean H. Keller



▲ "I became interested in printing," says Dean H. Keller, "in library school and have been associated with rare books most of my career. I have a small printing press which I use as a hobby." Keller is the associate dean of libraries at Kent State University. He has written or edited several books, among them *An Index to the Colophon* (1968), which contains much about printing, and "Bubb Booklets": Letters of Richard Aldington to Charles Clinch Bubb (1988). Bubb was in the printing business in Cleveland.

In the year 2005 we shall celebrate the five hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the invention of printing from movable type, and of all those years, the period that continues to fascinate scholars and ordinary readers are those very first years from 1455 to 1501. The books that were produced during this period are known as incunabula, or "cradle books" (produced in the infancy of the press). The first substantial work printed from movable type was the Gutenberg, or forty-two line, Bible, now considered the greatest book ever printed and probably also the most studied.

The facts concerning the development of printing from movable type in Europe are shrouded in mystery and controversy. With few exceptions, detailed records do not seem to have survived in any quantity, and those that have are often inconclusive and ambiguous. In any case, most historians today assign the invention of printing from movable type to Johannes Gutenberg, who was born between 1394 and 1399 and died in 1468.

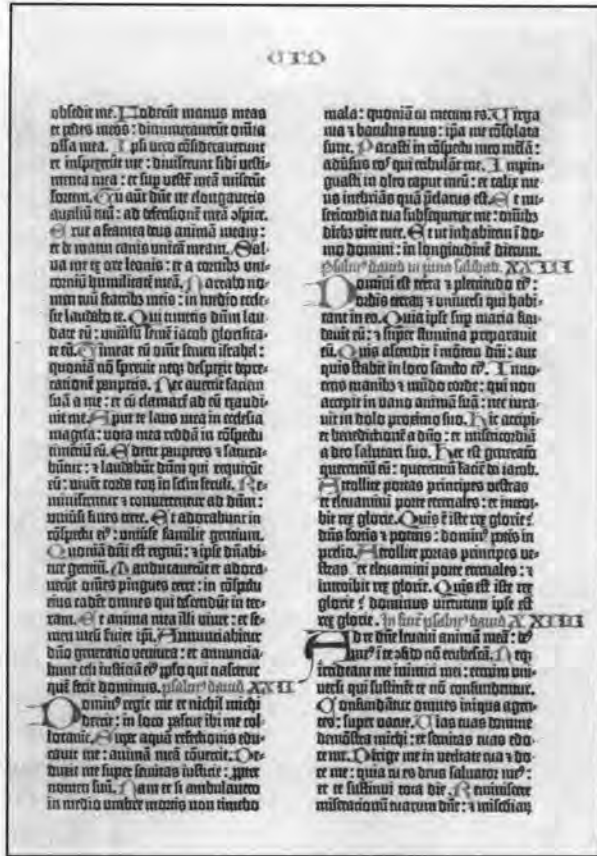
How much Gutenberg knew of the printing from wood blocks that was practiced in China, Japan, and Korea in the eighth century, of the stamps of baked clay invented by a Chinese smith named Pi Sheng in the eleventh century, or of the metal letters later used in Korea is not known for certain, but, since the evidence indicates that the knowledge and use of these practices did not spread much beyond the locality in which they were developed, it is generally assumed that he knew nothing about them. Gutenberg, who was a goldsmith and a member of a patrician family in Mainz, Germany, probably began to experiment with printing while a political exile in Strassburg around 1440. By the time he returned to Mainz, between 1444 and 1448, he had developed his invention to the point where he could begin to use it commercially.

It was Gutenberg's genius to have recognized the growing demand for books in quantity and then to have provided the means whereby largely existing technology, such as the wine press, paper

manufacture, and metal punches, could be combined to put many copies of the same text before the public in a short time. There were two pieces of technology, however, that were essential to printing for which Gutenberg seems largely responsible. These were the adjustable mold for casting type and the preparation of an ink that would adhere to the surface of metal type. Once all of these elements were brought together, the new industry known as printing began to flourish. No longer were readers who wished texts for study, devotion, or pleasure dependent upon manuscripts produced singly in religious or secular scriptoria, slowly and at considerable cost.

The process of printing which was invented by Gutenberg is known as "letterpress." It is basically simple and it is still in use today. Individual metal units with a face in relief that will produce a letter, figure, or some other character are set in rows to form the words of a text. These letters are produced in fonts, a complete assortment of types of one size and design, including capitals and small letters (upper and lowercase), numerals, punctuation marks, etc. When enough type has been assembled ("composed") to complete a page, or usually several pages, of text, the collection of type (or "form" as it is now called) is placed in a press, inked, and impressed on the surface of a sheet of paper. The process is repeated until enough pages are printed to make up the quantity of books wanted for the edition.

Inks used in Gutenberg's time for writing or printing from woodblocks were not capable of adhering to metal types. A combination of wax, oils, resin, and drying agents were added to the pigment, giving it the consistency of paste. It was also essential to have a plentiful supply of paper if printing was to flourish. The craft of papermaking is believed to have originated in China in the first century, and by the eighth it had been introduced into the Middle East. The Moors brought it to Spain in 1084, and the craft was practiced at Fabriano, Italy, before 1283, and later in France, Germany, and Switzerland, and in England in about 1490. European paper was made almost entirely of linen rags which were reduced to



Gutenberg, Mainz. Bible, Psalm 23. From a facsimile in Gutenberg and the Book of Books by H.L. Johnson, New York, 1932.

Seleucū ut sibi antea per
firmis custodis presidii
retro & angustis finibus
certinebāt iussu Seleuci pa
ti variis arboribus consiti
tebatur : qui cum crebro
s a Seleuco afferebant qui
salute sua & Seleuci libe
i & Stratonis aduentum
i quocumq; uelit : q̄ primu
Demetrius desperatis iam
cum Athenasq; regabant n

*An example of the first Roman
type used in Germany, in
Strassburg, c. 1464.*

***catchword**—to assist the binder in placing the signatures in order, the first word of a page was printed at the bottom of the previous page. Thus the binder needed only match the catchwords to first words and could ignore the page (or folio) numbers, which were often incorrect.

***folio**—a standard-sized sheet of paper (18 X 24) folded once to make two sheets or four pages of a book.

***signature**—the letter or number printed in the lower margin of each gathering or section of a book, as a guide to the binder in assembling them in the correct order.

a pulp by soaking and beating them. The pulp was then placed upon a screened molding tray from which the water was drained off, leaving the fibers matted in a thin sheet, which became a sheet of paper. The craft quickly adopted some of the techniques of mass production and the new industry was able to keep up with the printers' ever-increasing demand for paper.

The artistic abilities of the printers were perhaps most clearly manifested in the design of type. The type used by Gutenberg was known as "gothic" and was developed from the script used in manuscripts in northern Europe beginning in the twelfth century. The "gothic" style of type was used, with many variations, throughout the incunabula period, but it had a formidable rival in the "roman" types first cut in Strassburg in 1467 and fully developed by Nicolas Jenson in Venice in 1470. Aldus Manutius and his type-designer Francesco Griffo used "roman" type extensively, and the style, in all of its variations, became the choice of a majority of printers.

In looking at books printed in the incunabula period, or any books printed up to the 1820s for that matter, one will find no two books bound exactly alike. Books were issued by the printer with their sheets folded but loose or loosely stitched together. The bookseller or the private purchaser was left to have the volume bound to suit himself. Some printers, such as Aldus Manutius, are known to have put paper or pasteboard covers on their books, but these were meant to be discarded in favor of a more decorative and permanent covering.

When one looks at the pages of a copy of Gutenberg's forty-two line Bible today and recognizes that it is considered to be the earliest substantial work to emerge from this new industry, the word that comes most readily to mind is "miracle." It is difficult to understand just how a work so beautiful and so technically accomplished could have burst upon the scene seemingly with no predecessors or trial work other than some single-sheet letters of indulgence. Yet that seems to be what happened.

The printing of the forty-two line Bible was probably begun in 1453 and completed in 1455. As is the case with most incunabula, no publication date is printed in the book. The only date associated with the printing of this Bible that we know of today is August 15, 1456, written in the hand of the rubricator (an artist who drew initial letters and other decorations at the beginning of chapters and at other appropriate places in early printed books), who completed his work on that date on the copy of the Bible later belonging to Cardinal Mazarin. Scholars differ on the number of copies of the Gutenberg Bible that were printed, but it was probably 210 of which 180 were printed on paper and 30 on vellum. Each copy contained 641 leaves

or 1282 pages in folio,* without printed page numbers, signatures,* or catchwords.* There is evidence that three presses were used to produce the books, employing at least fifteen men. Today forty-eight copies, thirty-six on paper and twelve on vellum, are known to exist. There are fourteen copies in Germany, eleven in the United States, eight in Great Britain, four in France, two each in Italy and Spain, and one each in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Japan, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland.¹

The most recent sales of copies of the Gutenberg Bible—the H.P. Kraus copy to the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz in 1978 for \$1,800,000, the General Theological Seminary copy to the Baden-Wurttemberg State Museum in Stuttgart in 1978 for \$2,200,000, the Carl Pforzheimer copy to the University of Texas also in 1978 for \$2,400,000, and the Doheny copy to the Maruzen Company (booksellers) of Japan in 1987 for \$5,400,000—are tangible proof of the continued desirability of this great book.

Another work that is now attributed to Gutenberg by some scholars is the *Catholicon*, an encyclopedia compiled by Johannes Balbus of Genoa in the thirteenth century and widely circulated in manuscript. It was printed in 1460 on 373 leaves in type a third the size used in the forty-two line Bible. The historian of printing, S.H. Steinberg, sums up his account of this work by saying that "the book contains a colophon which it is difficult to believe to have been written by anybody but the inventor of printing himself. It therefore affords the solitary, precious glimpse of Gutenberg's mind; it reads:

With the help of the Most High at whose will the tongues of infants become eloquent and who often reveals to the lowly what he hides from the wise, this noble book *Catholicon* has been printed and accomplished without the help of reed, stylus or pen but by the wondrous agreement, proportion and harmony of punches and types, in the year of the Lord's incarnation 1460 in the noble city of Mainz of the renowned German nation, which God's grace has deigned to prefer and distinguish above all other nations of the earth with so lofty a genius and liberal gifts. Therefore all praise and honour be offered to thee, holy Father, Son and Holy Spirit,



Gutenberg (?), Mainz. *Balbus, Catholicon. Single Leaf in Gutenberg and the Catholicon of 1460 by M.B. Stilwell, New York, 1936.*

God in three persons; and thou, Catholicon, resound the glory of the church and never cease praising the Holy Virgin. Thanks be to God."²

Gutenberg's invention spread rapidly, often carried by German craftsmen, and by the end of the fifteenth century it was established in the main centers of Western Europe and England. Presses were established in Cologne in 1464, Basel in 1466, Rome in 1467, Venice in 1469, Paris, Nuremberg, and Utrecht in 1470, Milan, Naples, and Florence in 1471, Lyons, Valencia, and Budapest in 1473, Cracow and Bruges in 1474, Westminster in 1476, Geneva in 1478, London in 1480, Antwerp in 1481, and Stockholm in 1483. There emerged from all this activity many printer/publishers whom we remember today for their scholarship, technical skills, inventiveness, and business acumen.

Johann Sensenschmidt was the first to establish a printing press in Nuremberg in 1470, but he soon gave way to Anton Koberger, who became the dominant printer, publisher, and bookseller of the fifteenth century. At the height of his career he is believed to have employed over a hundred workers to operate his twenty-four presses. At times he contracted work to printers in other locations, and he retained agents in several cities, including Venice, Florence, Lyons, Paris, Strassburg, and Cracow, to market his publications. During his time, from about 1470 until his death in 1513, Koberger's printing house issued over two hundred titles, including current Latin literature, classical and humanistic texts, and a few but very important German works. Perhaps his greatest mistake as a businessman was his decision not to be Martin Luther's publisher, a decision that is

*Koberger, Nuremberg.
Schedel, Liber
chronicarum.*



understandable given Koberger's strong allegiance to the Catholic Church.

Koberger's crowning achievement was the *Liber Chronicarum*, a history of the world compiled by the Nuremberg physician Hartmann Schedel, which was issued in Latin on July 12, 1493, and in a German translation by Georg Alt on December 23, 1493. It became a best-seller and remains one of the best known publications of the incunabula period. This work was printed in an unusually large number of copies for books of this time—1500 of the Latin edition and 1000 of the German edition—and a recent census records 800 of the Latin and 408 of the German books still in existence in libraries.³ Two local wood engravers, Michel Wohlgemuth and Wilhelm Pleydenworff, probably with the assistance of Wohlgemuth's young apprentice Albrecht Dürer, prepared 645 woodcuts to represent 1809 people and scenes in the work. Obviously these 645 woodcuts were made to do multiple duty.

Great as Koberger's achievement was, many scholars would count the work and influence of Aldus Manutius of Venice as even greater. Although much of Aldus' major work took place after 1501 (he died in 1515), he had established himself in Venice in 1494, at the age of about 44, and began to print books in 1495. Printing was established in Venice as early as 1469 by Johannes de Spira and the city supported, for a time, such important figures as Nicolas Jenson, who was noted for his typographical excellence; Erhard Ratdolt, who is credited as the first to use a separate title-page and who was noted for the use of decorations in his books; and the Giunta family, which also operated printing and publishing businesses in Florence, Lyons, Rome, London, Salamanca, and Burgos. But early printing in Venice is indelibly linked to Aldus Manutius. John Oswald's first paragraph in the chapter on Aldus in his *History of Printing* says:

The great name in Venetian printing, the great name in Italian printing, one of the greatest names in printing of the fifteenth century and indeed of all centuries, is that of Aldus Manutius. He was not a follower, but a leader. He possessed the vision to discern new avenues of effort and the courage to follow the promptings of his convictions to final accomplishment.⁴

Aldus was trained as a classical scholar and spent many years as a tutor in several wealthy Italian households including that of Pico della Mirandola. The lack of reputable, accessible texts of the classical Greek and Latin authors prompted Aldus to produce them himself. The first book that he published was the Greek grammar of Lascaris in 1495, and in that same year he began work on his edition of Aristotle which was completed in five folio volumes in 1498. There followed a steady stream of Greek and Latin texts that were not only



Aldus Manutius, Venice.
Printer's Mark.

Caxton, Westminster.
Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, beginning of "The Friar's Tale." From a facsimile of the copy at Cambridge University, London, 1972.



Here begynneþ the frairs Tale

Byþon ther was dwellyng in my counte
 An archdeken a man of hyygh degree
 That holdyþ dymyþ wel exchaunge
 In punysshyng of fornycaoun
 Of usurycraft ande eke of lardrye
 Of dyffamaoun ande auoutrye
 Of cherych trupe ande of traumentis
 Of contract ande of lark of sacramentis
 Of sury ande eke of symonye also
 But certis lechours dymyþ in grettest booe
 They sholdyþ syngeþ þat they were kene
 Ande smale tithers also were soule frent
 If ony persone woldeþ vpon þe m þe pene
 Ther myght a certis no pryncipal pene

well edited and well printed but compact in size and inexpensive. We might compare them with the Modern Library or Everyman's Library editions, which even adopted Aldus' famous anchor and dolphin printer's mark. Among Aldus' most distinguished publications is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, an allegorical romance in Italian by Francesco Colonna published in 1499 with 170 wood engravings. This was the most heavily illustrated book that Aldus published; the artist has never been identified.

Rulers at various levels often issued a license or privilege for the exclusive right to print in a location, usually for a specified purpose or amount of time. The first privilege which seems to be recorded was that which the Signoria (City Council) of Venice granted to Johannes de Spira in 1469 for the exclusive right to print in Venice for five years. The privilege, which may have originated as a license to hold a business monopoly, eventually became a device to exercise intellectual control over artistic and other expression.

The printing press arrived in England at Westminster and was established virtually in the shadow of the Abbey, in 1476, under the proprietorship of businessman and translator William Caxton. Caxton

had learned the art of printing in 1471 and 1472 in Cologne, and at Bruges in 1474 he issued his own translation of the chivalrous romance by Raoul Le Fèvre, as *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*. This is the first book to be printed in the English language and it was followed by his translation from the Latin of the *Game and Playe of the Chesse* by Jacobus deCessolis, a second edition of the *Recuyell*, and several other books before Caxton returned to England in 1476. From his press in Westminster in 1477 came the first book to be printed in England, *The Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres* translated from the French by the second Earl Rivers, brother-in-law of Edward IV, and one of Caxton's patrons, along with Richard III.


Before his death in 1491 Caxton had published approximately ninety books, seventy-five of them in English, and twenty Caxton's own translations. By his translations and introductions alone, Caxton would have commanded

a lasting place in the history of English literature, but it is his service to the great works of English medieval literature that we are most grateful for. In 1478 he printed Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, one of the undisputed glories of the language, followed by a second edition in 1484 and other works by Chaucer such as the *Parliament of Foules*, *Hous of Fame*, *Boece*, and *Troilus and Cryseide*. He also printed poems by John Lydgate and produced the first printed edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* in 1485.

Caxton's assistant, Wynkyn de Worde, a native of Alsace, came to Westminster with Caxton in 1476 and took over the press upon Caxton's death. His work as a printer is remarkable for its quantity, for he printed between 700 and 800 titles between 1491 and his death in 1534. He was the first printer to make the schoolbook a major part of his business, and in 1495 he printed an edition of Ranulf Higden's *Polycronicon*, a popular history which Caxton had printed in 1482, which has the distinction of being the first book printed in England to have an example of music printed from movable type.

One of the most intriguing questions regarding the production of books in the fifteenth century involves their cost. How much did it cost to produce a book? What did the printer and his workmen earn by the process? How were authors and editors paid for their work? How much did a reader pay for his book? Ledgers, cost books, catalogues, and other documents are extant which contain some information that helps answer these questions, but they are fragmentary, scattered in time and place, and not really comparable, so scholars have been reluctant to generalize from them. The information they contain also seems to have been influenced by vastly differing circumstances. Rudolf Hirsch, in his *Printing, Selling and Reading 1450-1550*, concludes that "an attempt could be made to translate these amounts into modern currency, but this would be almost meaningless, since the purchasing power of money in the XVth century was so entirely different from what it is today. . . . [costs could be expressed] more meaningfully in terms of commodities."

Liber tertius **fo. cl.**



Dyapason
 Dyapente
 Dyapente
 Diapente
 Diapente
 Diapente

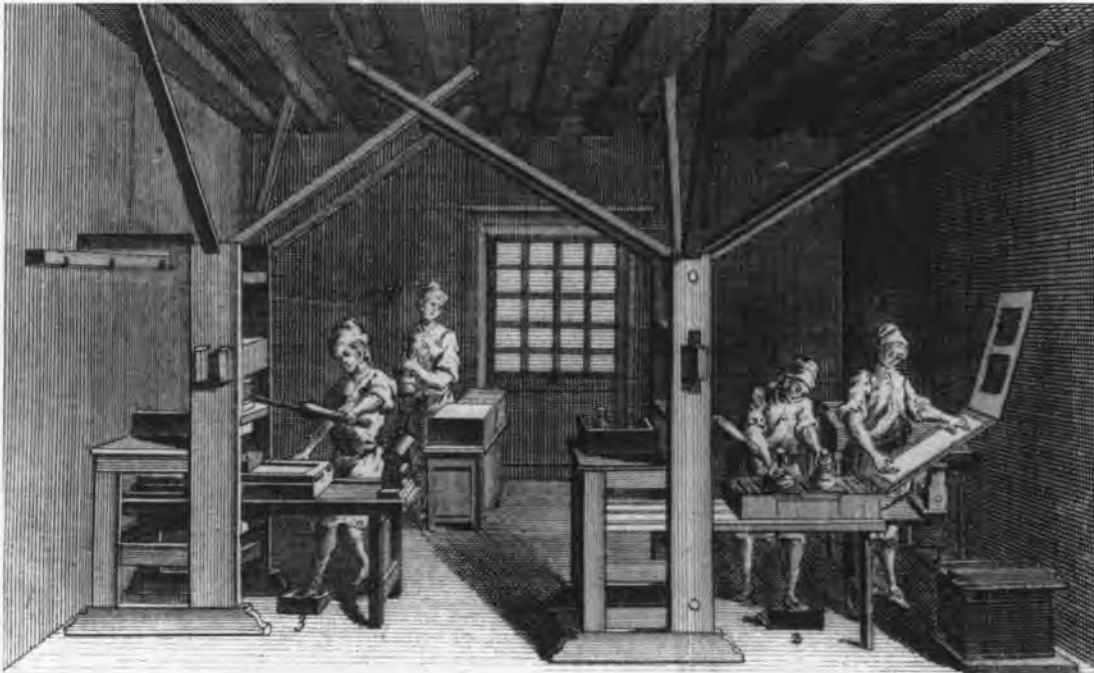
¶ He ha there ac-
 cordes were cū
 den ptagonas
 gane them ra-
 mes. and so that
 be called in nom-
 bze double / he
 called in lownes
 Dyapason. And
 that he called in
 nombze / other
 halfe he called
 in lowne Dyap-
 pente. And that
 that in nombze
 is called all and
 the thyrde dele-
 here in lownes Dyapente / and that
 that in nombze is called all and the
 eyghthe dele / here in tenons dou-
 ble Dyapason. As in melodye of
 one strange / yf the strange be strep-
 nethen longe upon the holowesse of
 a ten / and departe euen a two by a
 byrge sette thes byder in eyther
 parte of the strange / the lowne shal
 be Dyapason / yf the strange be strep-
 ned and touched. And yf the strange
 be departed euen in the and yf byr-
 ge sette byder / soo that it departe
 bytweene the twoe byes and yf thyr-
 de / than the lenger dele of the stran-
 ge yf it be touched shal geue a low-
 ne called Dyapente. And yf it be
 departed in nyne / and the byrge
 sette byder bytweene the laste parte
 and the other dele / and the lenger de-
 le of the strange yf it be touched shal
 geue a lowne that hete Tenon / for
 nyne contred eyghte / is the eyghte
 parte of eyght as in this figure that
 foloweth.

¶ Capm. . . .

¶ The name of phy-
 losophes hadde
 begynnyng of
 Dictagoras. For
 olde Grekes cal-
 led hym selfe so-
 phistes that is
 wise / But Dic-
 tagoras when men ased what man
 he was / he answered and sayde yf
 he was a philosopher / that is a lo-
 uer of wryte and of wrytoms for to
 calle hym selfe a wise man / it wolde
 seme grete boole a pyrde. Afterwar-
 de other philosophes hadden thes
 names of thes ancours. And soo
 they that heide Dyrtagoras looze /
 were called Dyrtagorici. And they
 that heiden Platonis looze / were
 called Platonici. ¶ Dof. libzo
 pyimo. Some philosophes hadde
 names of contrees / and so they that
 heide Dictagoras looze were called

Wynkyn de Worde,
Westminster. Higden,
Polycronicon.

For example, in 1473 Johann Schüssler sold five printing presses and various tools associated with them for 73 guilders, which was then the equivalent of nearly 19 tons of wheat, or about 76,500 eggs, or 13 tons of salt. Some evidence indicates that by about 1470 an identical text cost between 59 percent and 80 percent less in printed form than in manuscript.⁶ In 1469 Hartmann Schedel, whom we met earlier as author of the Nuremberg Chronicle, prepared a priced list of 19 books from which it has been determined that one ducat purchased 47-67 leaves in large folio and 60-80 leaves in regular folio.⁷ In other words, books were *very* expensive in the infancy of printing. Authors and editors were not paid royalties but received a lump sum payment for their work. They also received copies of their books. Printers, if their industry was to survive, had to bring their prices down. Aldus



Printing Shop from the Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Universel Raisonné, Yverdon, 1779.

Manutius led the way, and the industry flourished.

While it is dangerous to generalize, one can note certain common characteristics in these early books. A high percentage of them were folio in size and were issued in editions which seldom exceeded 500 copies. By the year 1501 there were printing presses in 260 locations in Europe and they had produced about 27,000 titles. (By comparison, in 1989 alone Germany published 15,544 academic titles and in the same year 53,446 hardback and trade paperback titles were published in the United States.⁸) At first, care was taken to make printed books look like manuscripts, and throughout the incunabula period the rubricator added initial letters and other decorations by

hand. Many printers helped the rubricator out by printing a very small letter in the space in which a large decorated version of it was to be painted, and there are many examples of spaces which were never filled by the rubricator. Indexes and page numbers were by no means common in the fifteenth century, and books were invariably issued unbound. Information such as the author, title, place of publication, publisher, and date, which we usually find on title pages of books today, was provided in a statement called a colophon and located at the end of the book.

While technology has radically changed printing today, it has yet to find a way to improve on the beauty and craftsmanship that emerged from those crude presses in the fifteenth century. Their survival is itself a testimonial. □

Notes

¹William B. Todd, "The Gutenberg Bible: New Census of Copies," *AB Bookman's Weekly*, Vol. 63, June 18, 1979, pp. 4656-4657; "A Gutenberg Bible Sells for Record Price," *New York Times*, October 23, 1987, III, 31.

²S.H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 18-19.

³Adrian Wilson, *The Making of the Nuremberg Chronicle* (Amsterdam: Nico Israel, 1976), 238-239.

⁴John Clyde Oswald, *A History of Printing* (New York: D. Appleton, 1928), 122.

⁵Rudolf Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading 1450-1550* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967), 32-33.

⁶*Ibid.*, 69.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*The Bowker Annual: Library and Book Trade Almanac, 36th Edition 1991*. Comp. and ed. by Filomena Simora. (New Providence, NJ: R.R. Bowker, 1991), 419, 424.

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Literature

Attila József: A Hungarian Fate

Lucas Myers



▲ *Lucas Myers, who is married to a native Hungarian, the violinist Agnes Vadas, began translating Hungarian poetry into English with her before they were married. "She read 'Mama' from the book of Attila József's poems she bought with her saved allowance when she was nine. We translated it and have not translated any other poet since." They now have a volume of translated poems by József ready for publication. Myers has been a seaman, an instructor in English and in cultural anthropology, a caseworker, an international relief worker, and a freelance writer and editor. A native of Sewanee, Tennessee, he lives in Pacifica, California, near San Francisco.*

In 1920, shortly after his mother died, Attila József, whom many Hungarians regard as the greatest poet the nation has produced, stretched his limbs across the railroad tracks outside Budapest and waited for the train to end his existence. He was fourteen and this was the second time he had attempted suicide. He waited, but the train did not come. Eventually he got to his feet and walked the tracks to meet it. It had been halted by a suicide up the line. "Someone else had died for me," he would say in later years. The incident is emblematic of the life of József's native country between the two World Wars as well as that of the poet himself: courting disaster and escaping it for a brilliantly productive few years, before ultimately being overwhelmed. Attila József was born in Budapest on April 11, 1905, and died at the age of thirty-two. During his lifetime Hungary passed through World War I and two catastrophic revolutions, was dismembered, and emerged—what was left of it—as a reactionary "regency," its independence threatened increasingly by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Yet the succession of political disasters in Hungary was attended by an artistic and intellectual efflorescence.

In 1905 Budapest was the sixth largest and fastest growing city in Europe. Its population had tripled since 1873 when Buda and Óbuda (site of the Roman Aquincum) on the west bank of the Danube and Pest on the east were united. By the outbreak of World War I, the population of Budapest had risen to 993,000. In the decades before the war, rapid industrialization and the poverty of the peasantry had brought an enormous influx from the countryside.¹

Borbála Pőcze, Attila's mother, had grown up in a Magyar family in Szabadszállás, a village on the great plain 40 miles south of Budapest. She had a taste for reading novels and was, as photographs show, an attractive woman before adversity wore her down. His father, Áron József, the son of a farm laborer, came to Budapest from Transylvania, then part of Hungary. In a braided jacket and sword doubtless borrowed from the portrait studio, he looks a bit ridiculous

in his photograph. He was a soapmaker and lived with his wife and young daughters, Jolán and Eta, in Ferencváros, a district of Pest, an industrial quarter along the Danube in the southernmost part of the city.

Just before Attila was born, a majestic, gray-bearded figure appeared to Áron in a dream. The child, it said, was going to be a famous man and should have a royal name; name him for Attila, King of the Huns. (Actually, today's Hungarians are descendants of the nomadic Magyar people, not the Huns, but the Magyar kings of the tenth century judged it useful to perpetuate the legend that they were the successors to Attila, the fifth-century "Scourge of God." In most European languages, the country is still known as the land of the Huns rather than the land of the Magyars [*Magyarország*].) Though Attila is now a reasonably common given name, in 1905 it was never used in the devoutly Christian countryside.

Before World War I, prosperity was increasing in the cities but large numbers of urban working people did not share in it. The poverty of the smallholders whose plots were too small to feed a household and of the landless peasants, together about three million people, was dire. The cities could not absorb all who needed work and large numbers emigrated. In 1907, the peak year, 200,000 Hungarians set out for the United States.²

The following year, when Attila was three, his father decamped, leaving the family without support. His mother claimed that Áron had gone to America to seek his fortune, and apparently Attila believed that his father had died in the New World or on the way to it. In fact, he had gone to a district that is now part of Rumania and Slovenia and established another family there. He died in November 1937.

Borbála József attempted to support her three children by taking in washing and working in the homes of the well-to-do. But she was forced to move them to progressively worse lodgings—to a tenement where they heard rumors of a suicide hanging in the third floor attic, whose flight from life they somehow identified with their father's disappearance; to one where criminals hid out in the basement; and finally to an inn which also functioned as a bordello. In desperation, she



Borbála Pócze, Attila's mother.

Áron József, Attila's father.





*A family photo from 1908 or 1909.
Attila, Jolán, Eta, and their mother.*



Attila and his sister Eta in 1918.

appealed to the League for the Protection of Children, which placed the two younger children, Eta and Attila, in a foster home for two years.

Attila was four and Eta a little older when they arrived at the house of peasant smallholders in Öcsöd on the plain southeast of Budapest. While Attila listened, the smallholder couple conferred with neighbors and came to the conclusion that there was no such name as the one he bore and decided to call him "Pista" (Steve). In later years Attila would write that at that moment he felt robbed of his identity. As a schoolboy back in Budapest, he would read everything he could find on the library shelves about the King of the Huns. During his stay at Öcsöd, Attila went to school in the village, worked as a swineherd, and from time to time was horsewhipped by his foster father.

A few years later, when Attila was nine, his hard-pressed mother again placed him in foster care in another town near Budapest. He ran away after three months and returned to his mother, but, without enough food or winter clothing, he soon fell seriously ill and spent several weeks in a hospital.

Attila's early adolescence coincided with World War I. After school, he wandered the streets of Pest scavenging bits of coal and wood for the stove. He sold water in a movie house and watched the films. As the fortunes of the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria) declined, conditions worsened in Budapest. With the armistice, the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy, and two disastrous revolutions, they became desperate; the shops were bare of food and fuel. Attila made a number of trips to Szabadszállás to beg provisions from his mother's family. In 1919, he got back from the last such expedition to find that Borbála had died.

At fourteen Attila was an orphan, left only with memories of his mother's struggle to support the family, of their separations and his need for her, and of his absence at her death. These memories inspired some of his most moving poems, such as this one, "Mother":

Towards evening one Sunday my mother sat
for a moment with a quiet smile
and the tea mug clasped in both her hands
as the dusk was gathering around her chair—

She'd brought her evening meal back home
in a little pan from a wealthy house.
We went to bed and I lay there thinking
the rich can empty a bigger pot—

My mother was small and she died young
since that's what washerwomen do,
their legs shift under loads of wash,
their heads throb at an ironing board—

for mountains they have piles of clothes,
for the play of clouds beyond the ridge
washerwomen have laundry steam,
for a change of air, the drying room—

I see her set the iron on its stand,
capital broke her fragile form
which was getting thinner all the time—
proletarians, reflect on that—

She was somewhat bent from scrubbing clothes,
I couldn't know she was young in her dreams
and the apron she wore was always fresh
and the postman wished her a pleasant day—

A little before Borbála József's death, a Jewish lawyer named Ödön Makai had fallen in love with Jolán, the elder of the two daughters, and married her. He now became Attila's guardian. Jolán he called "Lucie"; he hired French and German tutors for her and bought her a piano. Her rise into the bourgeoisie seems to have made it necessary for Attila and Eta to pose as servants when guests were present. However, literature owes a considerable debt to Makai; he provided his difficult brother-in-law with a great deal of support in succeeding years. It would seem that his wife was herself quite difficult. Eventually they were divorced and Makai married Eta.

Attila was coming of age in a fractured society. With the Trianon Treaty of 1920, the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, which had existed since 1867 as the continuation of the Habsburg empire, was dissolved and Hungary itself was dismantled, losing more than two-thirds of its territory and three-fifths of its population to neighboring successor states, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Poland. Between 300,000 and 400,000 Magyar refugees poured into what remained of Hungary, putting a further strain on the country. The Rumanian army, which had occupied



Borbála József in 1919.



Ödön Makai.



Jolán József.

Budapest at the end of Béla Kún's brief and chaotic Communist regime of 1919, retreated, looting the country as it went.³

In 1920, after the collapse of Béla Kún's government, the last commander of the Habsburg fleet, Admiral Miklós Horthy, became "regent" of the landlocked country. (Charles I, the last Habsburg emperor, who acceded in 1916, abdicated in 1918.) During the rest of Attila's life, Horthy was Head of State.

In 1920, the year Horthy came to power, Ödön Makai sent Attila to school in Makó, a town near Szeged, southeast of Budapest and about ten miles from the newly established Rumanian border. A number of teachers and residents of the town recognized his talent and befriended him. His intellectual development was marked, among other things, by the acquisition of a fair amount of German, French, Latin, and Greek. In "Curriculum Vitae," a statement he wrote as a job application in the spring of 1937, he describes himself this way:

My mother died in 1919 at Christmas time. The Orphans Board appointed my brother-in-law, the late Dr. Ödön Makai, to be my guardian. Throughout one spring and summer, I worked on the tugboats Vihar, Török, and Tatár of the Atlantica Ocean Shipping Company. At this time, I took the examinations of the fourth year of secondary school as a private student. Then my guardian and Dr. Sándor Geisswein sent me to train as a novice with the Salesian Order at Nyergesújfalu. I spent only two weeks there since I am not Roman Catholic but Greek Orthodox. After that, I went to the Demke boarding school at Makó, where I soon was given free tuition. In the summer, I tutored at Mezőhegyes to earn my room and board. I completed the sixth year of gymnasium with excellent grades



despite several suicide attempts, brought on by adolescent problems; then as before I lacked the guidance of a good friend. My first poems appeared at this time; *Nyugat* published some written at the age of seventeen. They took me for a child prodigy; actually I was just an orphan.

Attila's mental condition was unstable at the time he wrote "Curriculum Vitae," and this must have affected its tone. It is, however, widely quoted in biographies and memoirs and accepted in the main as factually accurate.

Nyugat ("West"), a magazine founded in 1908, was central to the development of Hungarian literature in this century and published the work of poets now seen as the most important of their time. Its name suggests the dichotomy between the Magyars—"a people of the East"—and the literature in which their tradition is perpetuated, one principally influenced by German, French, and English authors. Attila in later years liked to call attention to what he claimed was the epicanthic fold of his eyes, putatively inherited from his ancestors of the steppes. But his poetry belongs to a European tradition.

Attila left the gymnasium before completing his course. At seventeen, he had published not only poems in *Nyugat* but a first collection entitled *Beggar of Beauty*. The next year, he took examinations and received a graduation certificate. "About that time," he writes in "Curriculum Vitae," "I was prosecuted for blasphemy in one of my poems. I was acquitted by the High Court."

For a while, he worked in a bookshop but was fired because he discouraged the clients from buying any novels other than those of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Then he worked for a bank; it failed shortly after he left it. "I decided once and for all that I would be a writer and find some employment closely connected with literature," he continues in "Curriculum Vitae."

I enrolled in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Szeged to study philosophy and Hungarian and French literature. I took fifty-two hours of seminars and lectures, twenty of them for my examinations at the end of the semester, which I passed with distinction. I could eat regularly now and I paid my rent from royalties on my poems. It made me very proud that Professor Lajos Dezsi declared me competent to do independent research. All my hopes were destroyed, however, when Professor Antal Horger, who was my examiner in Hungarian philology, called me to his office and before two witnesses—I still remember their names, they are now teachers—stated that as long as he was there I would never become a secondary school teacher because, as he said, "The sort of person who writes this kind of poem"—and with that he held up a copy of the periodical *Szeged*—"should not be entrusted with the education of the rising generation." People often talk about the irony of fate: this poem of mine, "Pure in Heart," became quite famous. Seven articles have been

written about it; Lajos Hatvany more than once described it as the document of the post-war generation for "future ages"; Ignotus, writing about it in *Nyugat*, declared, "I have cradled and fondled this beautiful poem in my soul, murmured it and hummed it," and in his "Ars Poetica" he made this poem the model exhibit of modern poetry.

Here is the poem that enraged Professor Horger:

PURE IN HEART

I've got no father
or mother or god
or home or shroud
or woman in bed.

I've had nothing to eat
for the last three days.
But at twenty I'm strong,
let's see if it pays.

I'll deal with the devil
if I can't get a job.
My heart may be pure
but I'll kill and I'll rob.

They'll take me and hang me.
A death-bringing herb
will sprout where my beautiful
heart is interred.

"The next year," "Curriculum Vitae" continues, at the age of twenty, I went to Vienna and enrolled in the University there. I earned my living selling newspapers outside the Rathaus Keller [a restaurant in the city hall] and by cleaning the premises of the Collegium Hungaricum. The director, Antal Lábán, put a stop to this when he heard about me; he gave me meals at the Collegium and found students for me. I tutored the two sons of Zoltán Hajdú, Managing Director of the Anglo-Austrian Bank. From the low slum in Vienna where I had not even had sheets for four months, I went directly to Hatvan as the guest of the Hatvany family in their mansion. Mrs. Albert Hirsch, the lady of the house, paid my way to Paris at the end of the summer. There I enrolled at the Sorbonne. I spent the following summer at the seashore in a fishing village in the south of France.

The time in Paris was a very happy one for Attila, though he had scarcely enough money to survive. He wrote and published several poems in French.⁴

After the summer at the shore, Attila returned to Budapest for good. The famous symbolist poet Endre Ady, an original member of the *Nyugat* group, had died in 1919, but other writers—Mihály Babits, Dezső Kosztolányi, Frigyes Karinthy, and Milán Füst—could be found in the cafes. Between the wars, the intellectual life of the city was remarkably rich, not only in literature but in all the arts and sciences. In music, for example, this was the era of Bartók and Kodály, Dohnányi, Szigeti, and Hubay.

Attila spent two semesters at the University of Budapest in 1927 and 1928. He fell in love with Márta Vágó, the daughter of a businessman, and they planned to be married, but she was sent to London for a year's "trial absence" and their plans lapsed. In 1928, the National Health Service sent Attila to a sanatorium with acute depression.

From that time forward, symptoms of his mental illness showed themselves periodically and, towards the end of his life, with increasing frequency and severity. He had made the first of several suicide attempts at the age of nine, swallowing a quantity of what he thought was lye. When his mother discovered it was merely starch, Attila writes, she "sighed, relieved. At this, even I was relieved of my inner load. I forgot about everything and felt only her as she carried me into the room, put me to bed, and covered me. She sat there awhile, spoke a little, softly, only one or two words, I can't recall what, but it was very beautiful." In the deterioration of his last years, he gave expression to advancing schizophrenia in poems like "My Eyes Jump," where one part of him seems to be observing another part from a distance:

. . . Think that in this world I've got
no one and nothing and what I call I
I haven't got either. . . .

But during periods of normality Attila was an engaging personality. The writer Andor Németh, who knew him well, describes him as a "young man who showed no sorrow in his bitter struggles and, like a medieval saint, called the swallow his brother . . . He was a miraculous phenomenon—thin, appealing, playful like a four-month-old cub, wise and unassuming."⁵ Arthur Koestler, also a close friend, recalls,

He was of . . . Magyar, rural stock: of medium height, lean, sparse, sinewy, he carried his body like a regimental sergeant-major. He had a narrow forehead, calm brown eyes, and calm, regular features to which a certain dash was added by a trim moustache with pointed ends. . . . Nothing in



A snapshot of of Márta Vágó.

(his) unruffled appearance suggested that (he) had spent several months in a mental hospital, suffering from delusions, and was heading for the final break-up.⁶



Judit Szántó lived with Attila from 1930 to 1936.

Attila lived with Judit Szántó, a committed member of the illegal Communist Party, from 1930 to 1936. He called her his wife but they were never married, and he described the relationship as “an alliance, not love.” He himself had become a member of the “Anarche-Communiste” society in Paris and, in 1930, joined the Communist Party. Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, like chess, had a strong attraction for his powerful mind. But he rejected the idea of dictatorship, espoused a united front of the formations of the left while the party line still violently opposed it, and developed an absorbing interest in psychoanalysis—a practice, in the nature of things, unacceptable to a conspiratorial organization. Although he had thrown himself into party work and attended workers’ meetings in remote parts of the city, he was denounced by the dominant émigré Hungarians living in Moscow and expelled from the Party. Ironically, he had brought food in jail to Mátyás Rákosi, who became the Hungarian Stalin after World War II.⁷

Judit and Attila lived in deep poverty. At one time or another Attila worked as deck hand on a Danube tug, delivery boy, construction worker, day laborer, and busboy, but he never held any job long. His habit of sleeping till noon, which had considerably annoyed Ödön Makai when he was Makai’s charge, is still reported in 1933 by Koestler. Judit cared for him with absolute dedication, but at times they were near starvation. In 1935, he wrote a self-abasing letter detailing their desperate situation to Mihály Babits, whom he had intemperately attacked in a review a few weeks before, in the hope of receiving a major prize over which Babits had power. He was grievously disappointed to receive only a minor award. That he survived at all is a tribute to philanthropists like Baron Hatvany and to scores of friends and unrecorded lovers of the arts like the impoverished tailor’s apprentice who left a pengő (about twenty cents at the time and a considerable part of his weekly wage) on the table whenever he visited.

By 1935, when he was hospitalized for the second time with severe depression, Attila had published six volumes of poetry. His complete poems in the 1954 edition run to over 600 pages. The

emotional power of his work, transmitted through highly original handling of the language and with rare craftsmanship, gives it distinction. His name would probably be as well-known internationally as that of Rilke or Rimbaud if the poetry were not locked in a Finno-Ugric language. (Hungarian, with Finnish and Estonian, to which it is related, stands in isolation from the Indo-European tongues of the rest of Europe.) Hungarians say their language is made for poetry, and the critic Paul Iqnotus claims that poetry—not music, as most non-Hungarians would assume—is the finest achievement of their culture.

The forms of Attila's poetry are complex and often of his own invention; the rhymes are sometimes double, triple, or quadruple. Besides his mother and the splintering of the ego, his dominant themes are romantic love, the natural world, Freudianism, and socialist dialectics. "At the Edge of the City" illustrates the last of these subjects; here is an excerpt:

... Not God, not even intelligence
but coal and iron and oil—

actual matter created us,
poured us out in the molds
of this monstrous society,
fiery and hot,
to stand up for humanity
on the everlasting soil.

We follow bourgeois, soldiers, priests,
that's how we've become at last
faithful hearers of the law
and why the meaning of man's works
sounds in us,
like a viola's tone. . . .



Attila in spring, 1930.

The Communist Party, which expelled him, of course claimed him as a giant of socialism after his death and, understandably, some young Hungarians today who were exposed to the exploitation of his work by the discredited regime do not want to hear anything more of him, not being able to reconstruct the political and intellectual conditions of the time in which he wrote, when the evils of Nazism were largely apparent but those of Stalinism still were not. In fact the strength of many of his political poems resides in their luminous expression of the natural world. The ideological background probably appears no less marginal than it does, for example, in Wordsworth.

His "Ode," perhaps the most notable love poem in the language, develops the subject passionately, as in this passage:

I love you as a child its mother,
as silent pits love their own depths,
I love you as concert halls love light,
the soul loves flame, the body rest,
I love you as living creatures love
to live until they die.

Then, at the climax, the imagery rises to an almost mystical intensity:

How high is this dawn sky!
Armies shine in its ore.
The great light dazzles my eyes.
I think I'm lost I hear
the clatter of my heart
beating overhead.

"Ode" was inspired by a woman Attila met at a writers' conference in 1933, with whom he had the briefest involvement. Returning to Judit, he read the poem, addressed to another woman with a passion he had never shown her, and she attempted suicide by poison but recovered in the public ward of a hospital. From the time of the break with Márta Vágó to the end of his life, Attila repeatedly fell in

A photograph of Attila taken around 1932 by Judit Szántó.



love, mostly with women of the middle class or the intelligentsia and always with an unhappy outcome. In the summer of 1936, after he had left Judit, he was under treatment by Edit Gyömrői, a psychologist, who inspired several poems. In her apartment one afternoon he demanded the return of her fee (which someone other than he must have paid) on the grounds that she would not sleep with him although his cure required it. He threatened her and when her fiancé entered the room attacked him with brass knuckles. The fiancé wrestled him to the floor and disarmed him. Attila collapsed on the couch in tears.⁸

On February 20, 1937, Attila met Flóra Kormuczka, a student of psychology, at a soirée. As the other guests—an engineer, a lawyer, a stage director, a writer, and an editor—engaged in literary talk, Flóra administered Rorschach tests to Attila in another room and detected in them unusual symptoms not evident in his behavior, carriage, or poems. It was the beginning of perhaps the most

passionate of his attachments and inspired his “Flóra” poems.⁹

In her memoirs, published in 1987, Flóra recalls his gifts—an orange, flowers, a Bartók manuscript. He was “an incredible reciter of poems” and had any number of them by heart. She told him she felt only sympathy, friendship, and esteem for him; he spoke of love and marriage as the only real happiness in life. That April, in “the most beautiful moment of our acquaintanceship,” walking by the Fisher Bastion in Buda, she remembers responding to the extraordinary way in which he could “emanate happiness like a child” and make her feel at one with nature.

But Flóra fell ill with an inflammation of the heart muscle, was confined to a hospital for a month, and spent much of the summer of 1937 convalescing in the mountains. During Flóra’s illness, Attila developed an overpowering jealousy of his erstwhile friend Gyula Illyés, the poet and author of *The People of the Puszta*, an account of the oppressed life of the peasants on one of the great estates. Although Flóra married Illyés after Attila’s death, she claims that she did not have a romantic relationship with Illyés at this time. Her memoirs suggest that Attila’s love for her might have had a happy issue but for her illness and his deteriorating mental condition.

In August, Attila was confined to the Szieszta Sanatorium and remained there until early November. Friends visiting him report his smoking cigarette after cigarette and shedding endless tears. Jolán and Eta, successively the wives of Ödön Makai, had been estranged for several years. Before Makai’s death, Eta had borne him three children. In September, the sisters were reconciled and Jolán visited Eta, who was living with the children in a primitive house on the southern shore of Lake Balaton. Attila came to stay with them on November 4. Shortly afterwards, Flóra took the train from Budapest to visit him. She missed a connection and arrived late. Attila was devastated. In his state of mind, he took her lateness as an intentional devaluation of their relationship. A chance visitor also arrived and Attila referred to him as “her husband.” The next day, after Flóra had left, he said that she was dead.

On December 2, a carload of friends drove down from Budapest. The conversation was animated. They spoke of an “Attila József night” already planned in Miskolc, a new book of poems, a renewed possibility of securing the prize Mihály Babits had denied him a few



Flóra Kormuczka in 1937.

years before, a new beginning in the city after his convalescence. Attila was filled with hope. He wanted to go back to Budapest with them that same night, but there was no room in the car. It was agreed

Attila and Thomas Mann.



that he would go up on the train with Jolán at some later time.

Early on the evening of December 3, Attila went out of the house for a walk. His sisters let him go for a moment; they thought the evening train had already passed through. When it came down the track, Attila knelt by the rails. His right arm was severed from his body and his neck was broken. A day or two later, going through Attila's bureau drawers, Jolán and Eta found one of his shirts, its right sleeve cut off with a pair of scissors.¹⁰ □

Translations of poems are by Lucas Myers and Agnes Vadas Myers.

Notes

¹John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 64, 70-71.

²C.A. Macartney, *Hungary: A Short History* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962), 195-196.

³Macartney, 210, and Paul Ignotus, *Hungary* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 155 on refugees.

⁴Attila József, *Tanulmányok, Cikkek, Levelek [Essays, Articles, Letters]* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977), 504-541 on József's sojourn in Paris.

⁵Quoted in Anton N. Nyerges, *Attila József* (Buffalo: Hungarian Cultural Foundation, 1973), 21.

⁶Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 176.

⁷Ignotus, 179-181 on József's relationship with the Communist party.

⁸Ervin Gyertyán, *József Attila* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1966) on Edit Gyömrői.

⁹The account of József's relationship with Flóra is taken from her memoir: Illyés Gyuláné (Mrs. Gyula Illyés), *József Attila: utolsó hónapjairól [Attila József: The Last Months]* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó), 1987.

¹⁰Koestler, 181 on the death of József.

Jefferson and Affirmative Action

“Jewish males are over-represented on university faculties.”

—remarked during a discussion of how to strengthen affirmative action at a certain university

The woman who made this remark is no apologist for David Duke. Nor does she dismiss the Holocaust as a myth invented by the Elders of Zion. To suggest that her views are likely to sound anti-Semitic to Jewish (and many non-Jewish) ears would, I am sure, upset her. Indeed, had Jimmy (the Greek) Snyder opined in her presence that Blacks are over-represented in professional sports—only somewhat a parody of the opinion that got him fired at CBS—she would have been among the first to cry racism.

Yet she seems impervious to the fact that, if Jewish males are “over-represented” in academia, it is because they earned their way—often against bigotry as virulent as that met by Blacks. And lest you think I am recalling history so ancient as to have mere antiquarian interest, you might consider that when I began my academic career in 1963, as an English instructor at the University of Wisconsin, the department had only one tenured Jewish faculty member—its first.

What I am saying is that affirmative action, as practiced by most public institutions, is not a program for ending discrimination. It simply shifts the burden. This judgment, while hardly unique, may discomfit my liberal friends, who will wonder whether they must shove me in with the rest of the closet racists. In reply, I would suggest they look at the mirror held up to them by my example of the woman concerned about over-representation of Jewish males, and ask whether the image looking back appears familiar. For she reflects the degree to which affirmative action has distorted our understanding of rights (and the responsibilities that complement them) in a manner beneficial neither to society nor, in the long run, to the minorities it was devised to help. It encourages the insensitivity (to put the least invidious face on it) that induces us to pronounce certain groups “over-represented,” thus identifying them as convenient scapegoats, sacrificeable to the interests of other groups. It enforces the continued typing of individuals by race, religion, gender, or ethnic origin rather than by qualities of mind and character.

If this strategy for achieving “social justice” does not smell like racism by another name, I would like to know what that odor is. Not long ago, I found myself on the fringe of a conversation between a friend, a physician who supervised residents in a department of a major hospital, and an attorney

known for his strong advocacy of civil rights. "You have," the attorney admonished my friend, "too few minority residents in your program."

My friend shrugged. "We'd like to recruit more," he explained, "but we don't get many minority applicants, and those we do get are often less qualified than our white applicants (both male and female)."

"Well then," the attorney countered, "maybe you need a dual system of recruitment, by which minority applicants are held to standards different from others."

My friend raised his eyebrows (and his voice). "Would you," he asked, "want yourself, or your wife, or your kids treated by a doctor qualified under this different standard you're recommending?"

I need not report the answer to that question. We can guess at the picture in the attorney's mind of the urban poor—disproportionately minority themselves—queuing up at free clinics and emergency rooms to be treated by doctors qualified under his different standard. But he would have been as disturbed as the woman in my earlier example had anyone objected that his proposal was racist.

So what is going on here?

What is going on, I believe, is a perversion of two related Jeffersonian principles that Jefferson himself thought essential to democratic (he would have said "republican") institutions: the first, that all persons be guaranteed equal opportunity; the second, that opportunity extended equally to all persons would produce an aristocracy of talent. We seem to have replaced these principles with a kind of secularized doctrine of Original Sin, whereby the guilt of the fathers is visited on their sons (though not their daughters), and the identity of those required to foot the bill is decided by a comfortably impersonal statistical analysis of who is "over- [and under-] represented," for which no one need bear responsibility.

The Jeffersonian solution is quite different. It is education—which is why Jefferson became a founding father not only of the United States but also of the University of Virginia. He would have been puzzled (as, I confess, I am puzzled) by the attitude, widespread today, that denounces insistence on merit as "elitist," i.e., as a conspiracy to deprive certain people of their rights.

I know, of course, how short our society has fallen of Jefferson's ideals, that even Jefferson compromised them by holding slaves and by helping to write the legitimization of slavery into the Constitution. But these lapses bespeak Jefferson's human failings, and ours, or perhaps the political constraints that his age and the struggle to form a union of disparate interests forced on him, not the unworthiness of the ideals themselves.

The smug assumption that minorities can enter the aristocracy of talent only by special dispensation is, moreover, insulting to people like the conscientious, intelligent Black students I have encountered in my courses. They are as capable of earning their way as anyone else, and their achievements are tarnished by voices insisting on statistical measures of who gets what, and/or easier rides for minority aspirants.

What we must do to realize Jefferson's ideals—yet what we show distressingly little willingness to do—is to provide not minimally acceptable but the best possible education to all children equally on the primary and secondary

levels and to all people of talent equally on the university level. We must, that is, accept not just the rights but the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy and support our rhetorical gestures toward educational excellence with resources to match.

At this point, it would be reasonable for you to expect me to describe the program that, given resources commensurate with our rhetoric, I might build. That, unfortunately, would require another essay. Let me observe, though, that anyone (educator, politician, corporate CEO) who in one breath bemoans the dismal state of our schools and in the next proclaims that, nonetheless, we need spend no additional money to restore them is not to be taken seriously.

Of course, spending money indiscriminately is no restorative. So long as we consign teachers to the bottom of the professional scale, beneath their own administrators (and sometimes custodians), who are merely support-staff; so long as we build \$47,000,000 basketball arenas while cutting funds to university libraries, we will continue to get exactly what we pay for—and to pay for what we get: with inferior instruction, inflated administration, and maybe (if the price is right) a Division 1 winner, all bobbing in a miasma of ignorance.

The problem of education, in other words, is neither an educational problem, nor an economic and political problem. It is a cultural problem. We do not have good public schools because, fundamentally, we do not really want them—or we do not want them enough to sacrifice for them. Witness the regularity, in good times as well as bad, with which school levies lose throughout Ohio, or the predictable recurrence of budgetary panics in Columbus, partly remedied by pounds of flesh cleaved from education to the accompaniment of stirring maxims like “We must learn to do more with less.”

What we must learn to do is reject such claptrap, if we are to preserve not only our system of public education—without which equal opportunity is hardly even dreamable—but our democratic institutions. That would be at least a start toward real affirmative action, rather than the will-o'-the-wisp we are currently pursuing, which is little more than a contrivance to ease the consciences of some at the expense of others.

—*Barton R. Friedman*

Barton R. Friedman is a professor of English at Cleveland State University. His interest in affirmative action arises out of the fact that “in the university, as in other public institutions, it weighs in decisions as crucial as those involving personnel and curriculum.” Friedman’s most recent book is Fabricating History: English Writers on the French Revolution (1988). His article “Re-Assassinating Lincoln” was published in The Gamut’s issue #10.

Archaeology

The Unknown Soldier

A lost Confederate ring sheds new light on life in a Yankee prison

David R. Bush



▲ *David R. Bush was born in Kittery, Maine, and now lives in Pittsburgh, where he is director of the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Cultural Resource Research. He has a Ph.D. in archaeology from Case Western Reserve University and is especially interested in Native American prehistory, Civil War archaeology, and historic preservation. He began his investigations at Johnson's Island in response to proposed real-estate development of the island. (The developer, Carl Zipfel, he says, has been most cooperative.)*

Johnson's Island, Sandusky, Ohio—December 7, 1864

Dear Kate,

I have at last got your things ready to send to you and will start them in the morning. I will send you 1 shell cross, 1 guttapercha cross, 6 breast pins, 5 rings, 3 watch chains, 1 chain with a heart to it for Lill, a necklace, 2 sets of earrings, 1 set of cuff buttons, 1 heart, 1 fish and 1 acorn. . . . The shell cross I want you or Lill to have, and the necklace I made myself expressly for Lill, and had a heart made for it. . . .

Yours affectionately, Capt. W. Makely, C.S.A.

Far away from home, in an environment that often was bitterly cold, Captain Wesley Makely, like many other prisoners of the Civil War, made jewelry from wood, shell, and any other materials he could get his hands on to send back south, lessening the distance to his loved ones. The letters written between him and his wife from August 17, 1863, to March 29, 1865, which are now part of the historical record maintained at the Virginia State Library and Archives (Richmond, Virginia), reveal some of the experiences of prisoners of war during the Civil War. Captain Makely was one of approximately 9000 Confederate officers confined in the Johnson's Island Civil War Military Prison between April 1862 and September 1865.

The history of the Civil War is replete with accounts of battles and associated personal triumphs and failures. After the battles, when both sides were coping with the death and destruction, for many there began a second fearful journey, that of a prisoner of war. The American Civil War resulted in over 400,000 soldiers becoming prisoners of war, almost evenly divided between the Union and Confederate forces. These prisoners were confined in 65 facilities, 32 for the Union and 33 for the Confederates. For the Union, only four of these facilities were utilized throughout the war for confinement

of prisoners. Johnson's Island Civil War Military Prison was one of these four. Johnson's Island, located in Sandusky Bay, Lake Erie, just one-half mile south of Marblehead and two and one-half miles northwest of Sandusky, was the only one of the four that was built solely for the confinement of prisoners and was the only one designated for Confederate officers.

Prisoner treatment varied throughout the war, but conditions generally deteriorated as the war progressed. In the early years the prisoners received the same rations as the Union Guard and were allowed to buy additional food and clothing items. But as the war proceeded, and each side began to mistrust the other, heavier restrictions were placed upon the prisoners until rations were cut, additional supplements could not be purchased, and overall conditions became deplorable. Prisoners that entered the prison in the latter part of the war had no expectations of a quick exchange or parole, and soon experienced hunger, disease, and extreme suffering. Johnson's Island was not the worst prison in terms of death or disease, with only 235 recorded deaths (although the actual number may be slightly higher), but its historical and archaeological records attest to the changing policies on the treatment of prisoners during this disastrous era of American history.

Most of Johnson's Island is now privately owned land used for vacation residences. It can be reached over a small toll causeway, and the Confederate Cemetery, renovated and maintained by the Veterans Administration, is open to the public. Archaeological investigation of the prison site began in 1989. Since then I have been directing excavations there under the auspices of Case Western Reserve University (1989-1991) and the University of Pittsburgh (1992).

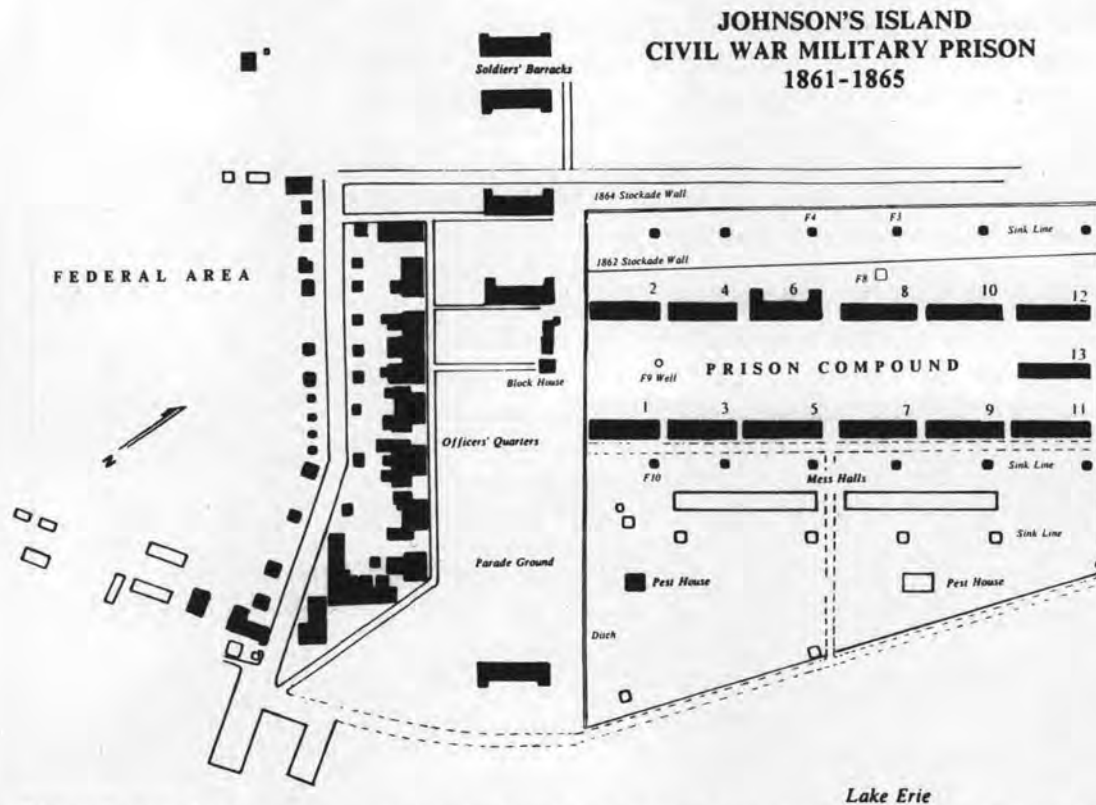
The discovery of one ring, lost over 125 years ago, has given us an opportunity to learn about some of the events that took place in this prison. We are curious about who the ring's owner was, how he felt when he realized he had lost his ring, what materials make up the ring, how this fine work of art could have been created under such unfavorable conditions, and if the soldier's living relatives know that their great-great-grandfather was once imprisoned on Johnson's Island. To try and answer these questions, we are carefully examining the ring as well as its historic and archaeological context.

One of the most important facts we know about the ring is that it was lost between 1864

The WBK ring was found along one of the walls of Sink 8. (See map on next page.) It is a size seven ring, lost at Johnson's Island Prison between August 1864 and September 1865.



and 1865. We know this from the exact location in which it was found: one of the “sinks” (latrines) that were built within the prison compound in August 1864 and that were sealed when the prison closed in September 1865. These sinks were located along the western “dead line,” a staked line thirty feet in from the stockade fence which surrounded the compound. The guards would fire upon any prisoner who crossed this line. As recorded, six sinks were blasted into bedrock, approximately five to six feet deep, measuring nine feet wide and fourteen feet long. Also in the summer of 1864, a ditch was dug inside the prison stockade. It was the discovery of the ditch that allowed us to determine accurately the location of the prison compound.



Composite map showing the various additions to the prison between 1862 and 1864. Feature 3 (F3) is Sink 8, where the ring was located.

After locating the ditch, our search began for the sinks. Using historical mapping prepared by the Union, the positions of the sinks were measured from known wall locations. Three test excavation units were dug in the hope of discovering evidence of three of these 125-year-old latrines. All three units excavated revealed evidence of latrines, and thus we focused on exposing the entire sink associated with prisoner Block Number 8. We refer to this latrine as Sink 8, where the ring was found.

Having excavated a one-meter-square test unit into Sink 8, we knew the sink had not been disturbed since it was sealed in 1865. This meant that anything found in the sink was deposited between August 1864, and September 1865, a time capsule from the Civil War. As we removed the limestone blocks, clay, and wooden planks used to seal the sink, we discovered that its sides were riddled with small cracks and crevices containing artifacts that had fallen into them during the latrines' use. In addition to the ring, we found such items as buttons, pocket knives, and an ink well.

As with many discoveries in archaeology, finding the ring was a combination of careful research and pure chance. I was sitting on a dirt pile watching the EarthCorps team (volunteers from EARTHWATCH) excavate when I decided that a very large limestone block lodged in the corner of the sink should be removed. Not wanting to overtax the crew, I jumped in to remove it. Once I got the block out, I immediately noticed a small black circular object pressed into the sink's clay wall. Although sinks were periodically cleaned, the ring was still there because it had fallen behind the block. This was lucky for us, because the ring is one of the finest pieces of prison-made jewelry we have found on Johnson's Island—and the only piece so far with initials.

One of the most important questions about the ring is: "Who wore it?" The engraved initials WBK are our best clue for determining its owner. After going through lists of Johnson's Island prisoners—in official records, autograph books, and other sources—we have found only one person whose name matches the initials: a Lieutenant W.B. Klugh from Gold Hill, North Carolina, who was serving with the 57th North Carolina Infantry when he was captured November 7, 1863, in Rappahannock. The Virginia Historical Society records indicate that Lieutenant Klugh was still on Johnson's Island in September 1864. So far we have been unable to determine when he was released from the prison.

The only way to prove that Lieutenant Klugh wore the ring would be if he had mentioned having it made—or making it himself—in a letter or diary. So far, however, attempts to find Klugh's military records have been unsuccessful. Since our work on Johnson's Island began in 1989, we have been contacted by many families who had relatives in the prison, and many of them have letters—and in one case a map—written by prisoners. We also have contacted over 150 museums and historical societies to gather documents from Johnson's Island. Although we have collected copies of diaries, letters, autograph books, and reminiscences from more than 150 prisoners, as yet none were written by Klugh. We suspect, however, the largest resource of primary sources (the original diaries and



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Gutta-percha carvings located within various sinks from Johnson's Island prison. All three have shell inlays. The upper figure is a cross inlay in brown gutta-percha. The middle figure is a brooch, backed in black gutta-percha with the name "Ella" carved in the shell inlay. The lower piece is part of a gutta-percha carving with shell inlay.

letters) are still to be found in the personal collections of families from the north and south.

Still we can speculate a little about Lieutenant Klugh—or whoever the ring's owner was. For one thing, he probably lost the ring because his fingers had become thinner. By late 1864, Union forces had altered their treatment of Confederate prisoners in response to reported atrocities occurring in Southern prisons. At Johnson's Island, where prisoners had at first actually gained weight due to full rations and lack of activity, a cutting of rations—combined with a prohibition against receiving packages from loved ones—quickly led to weight loss and even starvation.

While the ring may not tell us much more about its owner, examining it in detail does tell us a great deal about how it was made, which indirectly provides clues about this important time in history. The ring is made of eight separate pieces. The main material is a hard rubber-like substance commonly known as gutta-percha. One prisoner recorded, "There are men here making almost any and everything that can possibly be made of Girtipulture, (note presumable a type of wood common to the area) . . ." (7/31/1862 diary entry of Major James T. Poe, C.S.A.). Gutta-percha, of course, is not a wood nor was it found around Lake Erie. It is made from the sap of trees in the genus *Dichopsis* that grow on the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Sumatra, and surrounding islands. In 1851 Nelson Goodyear had patented a material made by combining India Rubber, or caoutchouc, with sulphur and other ingredients to produce a "hard and inflexible substance" (letters of Patent No. 8,075). This material could then be molded into any desired shape. Two companies, Novelty

Rubber Company (sometimes seen on buttons as the N.R. Co.) and the India Rubber Company, used the patent to make buttons, combs, and a variety of other items. Items from both of these companies have been found in the sinks excavated at Johnson's Island. Prisoners bought these items—calling the material gutta-percha, although they usually were made from the new, patented material—and then carved jewelry from them.

The artisan who made the ring did so by taking two gutta-percha buttons and—after skillful carving with a pocket knife, file, or small chisel or saw—joined them with three tiny brass pins. After examining the sides of the ring, we found (at the point where the top metal set stops and the curve begins) two pins that run perpendicular to

the ring on each side. These pins hold the buttons together. A third pin, once located on the opposite end of the ring, apparently was lost when the ring broke. Its owner then drilled small holes on either side of the break to tie the ring back together. Scanning electron microscope (SEM) examinations of the juncture between the gutta-percha pieces show that no adhesives were used to keep the pieces together; the brass pins alone created the tight fit.

Three silver sets complete the ring. The artisan's placement of these pieces of silver into the hard rubber was a masterful feat. Careful inspection of the top, rectangular set showed us two circular stress cracks (one just above the W and the other just below the K). These cracks correspond with silver studs that extend out the back of the set through the gutta-percha (in prepared holes), which acted as rivets that expanded on the interior surface. The two side shields also contain studs that secure them to the rubber. On the inside of the ring, the ends of these studs are polished smooth to the surface. Adding to the ring's support, a stud from each set was secured in each half of the gutta-percha. From examining other (broken) rings, we've learned that artisans precut the silver sets, placed them into the spaces, and used niello—a silver sulfide—to fill in the gaps. Because the black niello matches the gutta-percha, it did not detract from the beauty and design of the ring.

The top rectangular set is engraved with the initials WBK and bordered with a singular punctate design. SEM analysis of the set produced traces of iron, suggesting that the artisan used a steel tool to carve the initials. The two side sets, in the shape of shields, are bordered with the same design as the rectangle. SEM analysis of all three silver sets has led us to believe that the artisan used high quality silver. Historic evidence, in fact, shows the prisoners often used coin silver to make such jewelry, but we must examine this particular ring further to determine exactly the kind of silver it is made from.

The diaries and letters from prisoners tell us that some prisoners tried their hand at making rings, but failed, while others were earning up to \$3.00 per day carving rings and other types of jewelry for both prisoners and Union soldiers. Many carved some pieces, but needed

Entrance to the cemetery at Johnson's Island.





Another view of the Confederate cemetery on Johnson's Island.

other craftsmen to finish them. For instance, we have reference to one individual charging \$.05 per letter engraving. Apparently, much of the set work was done by a few talented individuals.

The detailed analysis of the ring itself and the historical and archaeological context within which it was found has given us an appreciation for the enormous value one artifact can have in the study of history. Whoever Mr. WBK was, when he lost his ring, he probably thought that it was lost forever. Finding the ring not only makes us wonder about its owner, but also about what it represents. The ring tells us about prison crafts, about sources of materials, and about the remarkable ability of human beings to create beauty during one of the most tragic times of U.S. history. □

The author would like to thank the Material Sciences Department of Case Western Reserve University for the SEM work and for identifying the ring's metal components; the National Archives staff for assisting the research; his 1990 and 1991 EarthCorps teams; and the many individuals who have provided information on ancestors who either served on Johnson's Island or were kept prisoner there. He welcomes any family history you would be willing to share.

Poetry

Richard Jackson

True or False

I have abandoned my life as a trapeze artist.
I will no longer hang my net from star to star.
Sept. 6, 1991, and I am push-starting Boris' Renault 4
down a hill into another era, swinging from the open
door to the roof bar as if I were one of the flying
Romanovs. It is 500 million years after
the increase in our oxygen led to skeletal animals.
A few hills behind us the Serbs are lobbing bombs
at a few Croatian churches. We are tracking a fugitive
future the way those aborigines in Australia follow
the dream paths that scientists think are the lines
of magnetic fields. They pause on a ridge, the last
drops of light soaking into the ground, listening
for the footsteps of old words kicking up a few stones
in front of them. Now the night begins its gossip
about the day. The important thing is to let
the momentum of your swing carry you smoothly,
without straining to reach, or you will break
the aerodynamic flow and miss the bar altogether.
Do you think we will make it all the way to Lipica?
Each time I enter a new dream of you, I find someone
has tampered with it. The world is only as true
as what you see through a commander's binoculars.
Therefore, I have abandoned my desire to fit
all my angels on the head of a pin. Over 96%
of visible matter is hydrogen or helium. Tank traps
litter the side of our road like a huge game of jacks some giant
has abandoned. The body of the giant, Cormoran,
lies at Dinusul, England, which just happens to sit
on a bardic dream path as ancient as those of the aborigines,
and includes Stonehenge and Glastonbury Abbey
where in 1539 Henry VIII hung, drew and quartered
the last abbot, Richard Whiting, while preparing to marry

▲ "Last September," says Richard Jackson, "I attended a writer's conference in Slovenia, delivered a letter co-signed by 40 American poets to stop the war in Croatia and helped draft another letter to send to Serbia. I think writing is always an act of discovery, a means to transport that brings us to other realms. I try to include as many of those other realms as I can simultaneously, to help explore and discover new truths of the heart, and to keep the poem honest by having these different contexts implicitly question each other." Jackson is a professor of English at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga and editor of *The Poetry Miscellany*. "True or False" is from his third book of poems, *Alive All Day* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 1992).

his fourth wife. In that year Spain annexed Cuba.
Also, the first Christmas tree was introduced at Strassburg.
Why have I always been fascinated with dates?
This little Renault 4 can do over 80 in fourth gear.
Maybe I should abandon my desire to peek through
the keyholes of history. I have already abandoned
my desire to do a triple twist somersault
back through my own formative years. Maybe
I should just lie quietly inside you while our old selves
slip in and out of the back rooms of the soul.
Or maybe Descartes was right—we each become
two people, avoiding clandestine meetings
with ourselves. There are some people who try to arrange
their lives so they don't even have to be present.
Maybe that's why Rumor has wandered out of Vergil,
out of the fires and rubble of Carthage, only to huddle
under a streetlight in its oversized coat, studying the maps,
trying to find its way past the shanties of our hearts,
trying to find a life in the files of some general.
In a few minutes, we will pass this wreck and traffic
will flow smoother. Why do they always pull a coat
over the face of the old man who has been struck?
In Brazil, the boy who was born without a face
gradually had the few parts that were there arranged,
the rest being invented by the doctors until by now
everything has been done but incomplete. Only
the shallow, as Oscar Wilde said, will ever know themselves.
Maybe I should abandon everything except a few harmless
details. We can just rest awhile in one of these
loopholes of the wind. I can stroke the soft petal of your belly.
No car. No war. No lies. The kind of life enjoyed
by broccoli in cheese sauce. Did you know that
horseback riding began in the Ukraine 6,000 years ago?
That there are 2 million atoms of nickel for every
four of silver in our galaxy? That Bernie Doyle and I
cut half a day in the 3rd grade coat room before
the nuns found us? If I pile up enough of these facts
we can all just forget about the truth. I remember
swinging from prank to prank along the ladder
on our schoolyard jungle gym. The curious thing
about the Renault 4 is that the gear shift is built
into the dashboard. Only 17% of Americans believe
Elvis is still alive. Believe me when I say that trapeze
artists are very big in this part of the world. In 1950

Edgar Rice Burroughs died while reading the comic pages.
That was about the time a whole flock of regrets started
descending over Croatia. In the third century the emperor
of China was buried with 6,000 individualized clay soldiers.
In 1980 Libya ordered England off its maps creating
a new arm of the North Sea. It would have taken more
than my incredible repertoire of aerial acrobatics
to avoid the train loads of errors shipped to us over time.
Like the TV detective of my childhood I just want the facts.
In 1955 the nuns marched us across the street from
St. Patrick's school to attend the wake of a classmate.
I had not yet abandoned my love for Maureen Brennan.
I bought my first telescope and saw my first binary star.
I leaned over, as I was told, to kiss the side of his face
not covered by bandages to hide the cancer.
On Mt. St. Helens, patches of flowers are growing
out of ash in the shape of decayed animals that died there.
If we ever wrecked this tin car we'd be dead.
For thirty years I couldn't attend another funeral.
On Sept. 6, 1991 in Croatia seven men are laid out
by the side of the road like burnt wicks, throats cut,
testicles jammed into their mouths. For 30 years
I believed my friend, Bernie Doyle, had moved away,
but it was him, wasn't it, in that casket in 1955.
Every day, it seems, another dream is chained
to the cell wall. Even the flowers have put on
their gray trenchcoats. 12 billion light years from here
a gas cloud 100 times the size of the Milky Way is
getting ready to form a second generation of stars
from the elements of millions of supernovas,
which means that all life begins in a kind of fog
and no matter how many times we start over
we will never see clearly enough. Therefore,
I am abandoning my life as a fish, my reptilian brain,
even my allegiance to the lower animals. What we are is
62,000 miles of capillaries if we care to line them up.
It seems like every galaxy is tumbling through space
as if it, too, had missed in its grab for the bar.
According to the laws of entropy the more I write
the less true it all becomes. In fact, only the autobiographical
parts of this poem are true. Maybe we are just the abandoned
drafts of something better. Why had it taken me thirty years
to abandon my dream for Bernie? When we get to Lipica
I am going to clean the windshield. I will abandon

my communications with life on other planets. I abandon the net, the chalk of a sure grip on these details, the wristband that braced me against desire. Maybe our dearest truths are shoes we abandon in some old dumpster. In 1910 thousands of people bought gas masks to protect themselves from the cyanide in the tail of Halley's Comet. In 1578 the Bishop of Magdeburg revealed that a comet is the thick smoke of our sins. If this were true the night sky ought to be a good deal brighter. If this car doesn't make it all the way to Lipica we will have to abandon it next to one of those burnt-out trucks that stopped the tanks. I can still see the red freckles covering Bernie's face. We had to write something forgettable 1,000 times for skipping class. We will have to wait for the night to slip back into its burrows. Maybe we should forget about Lipica and head for Piran and its topless beach. It is the home of the composer Giovanni Tartini (1692-1770) who wrote *The Devil's Trill Sonata* which might as well be our theme song. Besides, it seems our Renault 4 has taken a wrong turn somewhere and we must abandon everything. Boris himself will invent us from the smell of abandoned fruit stands. We will spend the rest of the day inventing a kind of love that no longer exists in the world, a kind of love no army can pillage at the outposts, no rumor could bring to its knees like a traitor, no heart will leave abandoned at the crossroads. Here Truth is lounging beneath a great oak, waiting to bum another ride. Somewhere, a nameless star is collapsing, but its light won't stop arriving, it won't ever stop arriving for millions of years.

Editor's Choice

I admire Richard Jackson's poem "True or False" because it tackles big questions, questions about love, death, reality, and "man's inhumanity to man," with honesty and feeling, while managing to avoid the pitfalls that these subjects often lead writers into—sentimentality, self-pity, cliché, and moralizing. Jackson accomplishes this feat by indirection and understatement. The poet does not speak directly to the reader, but gives us a dramatic monologue consisting of a man's thoughts as they pop into his head in a stream of consciousness. At first the ideas seem incoherent and the speaker confused. The short, simple sentences emphasize the thoughts' apparent randomness. But gradually a pattern of themes and images emerges so that by the end, the fragments fit together and we are willing to accept the upbeat conclusion.

The man is mentally addressing a woman who is driving with him in a small French car through the Yugoslav countryside in the midst of the 1991 civil war. Apparently the couple have borrowed the car from a friend, Boris, and are headed for the town of Lipica; they hear mortar fire and see burnt-out vehicles and other evidences of the war. They pass the scene of an accident where an old man has been killed. As night comes on, they realize they are lost and may never reach their destination.

Meanwhile several strands of thought are weaving in and out of the man's consciousness. The horrors of the war, such as the six mutilated corpses that have just been found, lead him to think of other deaths, in particular that of his childhood pal Bernie, who died of cancer when they were in grade school, a death that has taken him thirty years even to acknowledge. He thinks of other instances of refusal to accept death—people who think Elvis is alive, the Chinese emperor who had 6000 pottery soldiers buried with him. The poet looks back at the past and its dead through “the keyholes of history.”

He wonders what is real and whether anything can be identified as truth. He desperately grasps at “facts” as something he can depend on: “The world is only as true/ as what you can see through a commander's binoculars.” Many bits of this kind of “truth” come to his mind, but he realizes that they are merely trivia, the kind of answers that might satisfy a true-or-false test but tell us little about reality. (On another level, however, these details contribute to the poem's symbolic impact. For example, the association of Richard Whiting's execution, the conquest of Cuba, and the first Christmas tree in Strassburg links political murder, colonial exploitation, and sentimentalized religion.) Some of the “facts,” such as the Bishop of Magdeburg's explanation of comets, are patently false, and indeed the poet begins to doubt the truth of everything. Rumor (false knowledge) is personified as a refugee seeking validation “in the files of some general”—i.e., in some official distortion of reality.

The poet keeps returning to images of outer space, drawing on what has evidently been his long interest in astronomy. The opening lines introduce this star imagery, which becomes a key metaphor in the poem. The stars seem to suggest universals or ideals; the poet pictures himself as having been a cosmic trapeze artist—that is, one who moved skillfully in a higher world of ideas. But he has lost his nerve; the horrors of the world have gotten to him, and his sense of reality has shrunk to factoids and immediate sensations. He no longer engages in abstruse speculations, which he satirizes as being like the proverbial medieval debate over how many angels can dance on a pin. The successful acrobat of the spirit must move confidently, instinctively, never forcing his ideas. But the universe itself seems to have “missed in its grab for the bar” and become only a random agglomeration of matter.

Still, the repeated references to the vastness of space put earthly tragedies in perspective. This larger view is reinforced by the repeated glances backwards through history, back to the beginnings of life on earth. The speaker in “True or False” feels a bit like Keats in “When I Have Fears”:

... on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
 Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

But this poet refuses to retreat into an unthinking, unfeeling stupor, “the kind of life enjoyed/ by broccoli in cheese sauce.”

At the end of the poem it seems that the couple may never get to Lipica. But in spite of their danger and the devastation they have witnessed, the poet somehow rallies and decides that if he and his companion can't find love and truth in the world as it is, at least they can create (or rather, discover, the root meaning of “invent”) their own ideal versions. He pictures Truth (balancing Rumor, personified earlier) as a hitchhiker waiting, without any urgency, for the next ride that comes along. The poem's cold comfort reminds me of Matthew Arnold's “Dover Beach,” where the speaker finds himself and his love

... here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

For Arnold the only hope is “Let us be true to one another.” The final lines of “True or False” imply, through their astronomical metaphor, that even though the world is falling apart and full of horrors, truth and love can still survive, just as light from an extinguished star keeps on traveling forever. So the poem ends bravely without shutting its eyes to grim reality.

But why, some reader of *The Gamut* may ask, doesn't Jackson just tell us his ideas directly instead of putting them in such a confusing form? Well, that's the difference between poetry and prose. A poem provides not information or advice, but an experience. As I read this poem I feel the poet's pain but am cheered by his courage in grappling with it. There is a therapeutic value just in getting everything out on the table, even terrible things. And when the speaker, by his touches of wit and irony, shows he retains some control and perspective, the process is all the more healing. The poem's difficulty forces me to become engaged, so that I participate in the exhilarating leaps from galaxies to broccoli to Bernie Doyle in his casket. “True or False” makes me feel more keenly both the suffering and the joy of being alive.

—Leonard Trawick

Biography

The Mystery of Elizabeth Whitman

Linda B. McLatchie

The death of Elizabeth Whitman in 1788 has all the makings of an eighteenth-century melodrama: an unmarried woman from a prominent Connecticut family takes lodgings in a Massachusetts tavern under an assumed name, gives birth to a stillborn baby, and soon after succumbs to childbed fever. When her identity and social position are discovered, the newspapers print her story, which scandalizes the new nation and becomes the subject for sermons.

From the time her tragedy occurred Elizabeth Whitman has interested both novelists and playwrights. Most notable and enduringly popular was Hannah Webster Foster's novel, *The Coquette*. First published in 1797, it became one of this nation's first bestsellers. Over the years, it has gone through dozens of reprints, the latest being in 1986. The story is told in a series of letters and is based on events in Elizabeth Whitman's life, although her name is changed to Eliza Wharton. Some have even speculated that Elizabeth Whitman was the model for Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

For the modern reader the story is interesting not so much for its scandal or moral lesson (two sides of the same Puritan coin) but for its reminder of the mores and moral assumptions of our forebears, who were just as passionate as we, but were bound by stricter codes, and meted out far heavier punishment to the female transgressor than the male.

Elizabeth Whitman was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1752. Her father, Elnathan Whitman, was the pastor of Second Church in Hartford, and was himself descended from a line of ministers, including the renowned Solomon Stoddard of Northampton. He died in 1777. Elizabeth's mother, Abigail Stanley, was the daughter of Colonel Nathaniel Stanley, who had once been Treasurer of the colony of Connecticut. Elizabeth Whitman was also related, on her



▲ Linda B. McLatchie, a native of Manhattan, earned a degree in sociology and Italian literature at NYU and now lives in Sherborn, Massachusetts, where she works as a graphic designer. Her interest in the subject of this article stems from the fact that Hannah Webster Foster, the author of *The Coquette* and a contemporary of Elizabeth Whitman, was her ancestor. McLatchie is also interested in fifteenth-century English history, the Shakespeare authorship question, photography, and radio broadcasting for the blind (on *Audio Journal*).



*This engraving appeared in the 1831 edition of *The Coquette*; it is believed to be based on a likeness of Elizabeth Whitman. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.*

father's side, to the Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards, and to Aaron Burr.

Elizabeth was engaged to be married twice; both men had been preceptors at Yale. Her first fiancé, Joseph Howe, was pastor of New South Church in Boston. Howe's health was delicate, and when he fell gravely ill, Elizabeth dutifully nursed him until his death. She later became engaged to another minister, Joseph Buckminster, a distant kinsman on her father's side. Buckminster was subject to severe headaches and fits of depression, and, as Elizabeth soon learned, unreasonable jealousy. When Buckminster saw Elizabeth talking to another man in her garden (it was her cousin, Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth), he broke off the engagement, and moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. This departure may have come as a relief to Elizabeth.

Probably around Christmas of 1787, Elizabeth discovered that she was pregnant. Conceiving a child prior to marriage was certainly not exceptional

at the time. Looking at genealogical records of late eighteenth-century Americans, one finds many babies born a scant four or five months following their parents' wedding. Even the Puritans winked at the practice of bundling—after all, the need to populate a new land was paramount—but bearing a child out of wedlock was different.

As her pregnancy became increasingly apparent, she left her widowed mother's home in Hartford and journeyed through Massachusetts. She stayed for a while in Springfield and later planned to visit a friend in Boston. But she did not show up as expected in Boston and instead took refuge at the Bell Tavern in Danvers (now Peabody), unaccompanied by friend, relative, or maidservant. She arrived in late May or early June, when she was in her eighth month of pregnancy, and registered under the name of Walker. She told the landlord, Captain Goodhue, that she expected her husband, Thomas Walker, to join her shortly.

Elizabeth spent the last days of her pregnancy making clothes for the baby, writing, and singing. She rarely left her room until dusk, when she would go for a walk.

At Elizabeth's age, 36, the risk of complications to both mother (especially a first-time mother) and child were great. The fact that she was probably emotionally distressed and far from friends and family no doubt placed an even greater strain on her physical resources. In July 1788 Elizabeth gave birth to a stillborn baby; she subsequently contracted childbed fever and died on Friday, July 25. Two days later, she was buried in the Old Main Street Burial Ground in Danvers. Before her true identity became known, the innkeeper wrote the following notice that appeared in the *Salem Mercury* on July 29:

Last Friday [July 25], a female stranger died at the Bell Tavern, in Danvers; and on Sunday her remains were decently interred. The circumstances relative to this woman are such as excite curiosity, and interest our feelings. She was brought to the Bell in a chaise, from Watertown, as she said, by a young man whom she had engaged for that purpose. After she had alighted, and taken a trunk with her into the house, the chaise immediately drove off. She remained at this inn till her death, in expectation of the arrival of her husband, whom she expected to come for her, and appeared anxious at his delay. She was averse to being interrogated concerning herself or connexions; and kept much retired to her chamber, employed in needle-work, writing, &c. She said, however, that she came from Westfield, Connecticut; that her parents lived in that State; that she had been married only a few months; and that her husband's name was Thomas Walker;—but always carefully concealed her family name. Her linen was all marked E.W. About a fortnight before her death, she was brought to bed of a lifeless child. When those who attended her apprehended her fate, they asked her, whether she did not wish to see her friends: She answered, that she was very desirous of seeing them. It was proposed that she should send for them; to which she objected, hoping in a short time to be able to go down to them. From what she said, and from other circumstances, it appeared probable to those who attended her, that she belonged to some country town in Connecticut: Her conversation, her writings and her manners, bespoke the advantage of a respectable family & good education. Her person was agreeable; her deportment, amiable & engaging; and, though in a state of anxiety and suspense, she preserved a cheerfulness, which seemed to be not the effect of insensibility, but of a firm and patient temper. She was supposed to be about 35 years old. Copies of letters, of her writings, dated at Hartford, Springfield, and other places, were left among her things.—This account is given by the family in which she resided; and it is

hoped the publication of it will be a means of ascertaining her friends of her fate.

Of course, this account titillated readers—who was this woman who deliberately hid her identity, and where was her elusive “husband”? It was reprinted in papers in New England and throughout the nation. When it became known that she was the unmarried daughter of a minister and from a socially prominent Connecticut family, the moralizers turned her story into a didactic lesson: single women who “coquetted” did so at their peril.

The *Independent Chronicle* of September 11, 1788, printed the following extract of an anonymous letter from Boston that sums up this attitude:

In one of our papers there is an account from Danvers, of a woman who died of a puerperal fever—a stranger, supposed to be from Connecticut, &c. I need not mention the whole, as you will doubtless see it. What I mention it for is, that I think the story may serve as a good moral lecture to young ladies: For this lady whose conduct appeared so mysterious, proves to be the daughter of a deceased clergyman, in Connecticut. She was handsome, genteel and sensible, but vain and coquettish; a great reader of romances. She refused two as good offers of marriage as she deserved, because she aspired higher than to be a clergyman’s wife; and having coquetted till past her prime, fell into criminal indulgences, proved pregnant and then eloped—pretending (where she lodged and died) to be married, and carried on the deception till her death.

Souvenir hunters have so badly ravaged Elizabeth Whitman’s tombstone that only the base remains with the phrase: “And the tears of strangers watered her grave.”



This letter introduced the erroneous idea that Elizabeth Whit-

man had *refused* two marriage proposals. The letter also rests on two beliefs current at the time: that a woman should aspire no higher than domestic bliss and therefore should not refuse a legitimate marriage proposal; and that reading novels—particularly romance novels—stirred women’s minds to “dangerous” ideas such as love and sex outside of marriage.

When friends and family learned of Elizabeth’s death, they erected a tombstone over her grave. The epitaph, which has been attributed to Hannah Foster, the novelist, and also to the poet Joel Barlow, read as follows:

This humble stone, in memory of Elizabeth Whitman, is inscribed by her weeping friends, to whom she endeared herself by uncommon tenderness and affection. Endowed with superior acquirements, she was still more distinguished by humility and benevolence. Let candor throw a veil over her frailties, for great was her charity to others. She sustained the last painful scene, far from every friend; and exhibited an example of calm resignation. Her departure was on the 25th day of July, A.D. 1788, in the 37th year of her age, and the tears of strangers watered her grave.

Throughout the 1800s, souvenir hunters vandalized the tombstone. Today, it can be seen in the barren Old Main Street Burial Ground in Peabody; only the bottom portion containing the last phrase remains.

After Elizabeth died, the innkeeper and his wife collected and inventoried her personal belongings. It is a list of small everyday items—clothes, spoons, writing paper—along with “Sundry Babe cloths.”

Also among her personal effects was her correspondence. As Elizabeth lay dying, she had asked a Mrs. Very to help her burn some letters, presumably those that identified her lover. In September of that year an anonymous person signing himself “Curiosos” sent a letter and a poem to the *Massachusetts Centinel* claiming they had been found among the effects of Elizabeth Whitman:

Must I die alone? Shall I never see you more? I know you will come, but you will come too late . . . Tears fall so, I know not how to write. Why did you leave me in so much distress? But I will not reproach you. All that was dear I left for you: but do not regret it.—May God forgive in both what was amiss:—When I go from hence, I will leave you some way to find me;—if I die, will you come and drop a tear over my grave?

The poem was entitled “Disappointment.” Its last few lines read:

O, thou! for whose dear sake I bear,
A doom so dreadful, so severe,
May happy fates thy footsteps guide,
And o'er thy *peaceful* home preside;
Nor let E__a's early tomb
Infect thee, with its baleful gloom.

It is impossible to ascertain the authenticity of these papers. If we do consider them, however, we can see how improbable it is that the letter and poem refer to the second fiancé. Elizabeth Whitman must have had an affair with someone her family would not have accepted as a son-in-law, or with a married man, or with someone who made her promises he did not keep. The absolute lack of information about this person has not prevented speculation about his identity.

Some have suggested that Joel Barlow was the father. Barlow was a minor poet, perhaps now best known for "Hasty Pudding" (1793), a mock-epic poem to cornmeal mush, and "The Vision of Columbus" (1787), an intensely nationalistic poem. In 1779, Barlow had been simultaneously courting Elizabeth Whitman and Ruth Baldwin. Elizabeth, who had twice been engaged by this time and was beginning to be considered a spinster by the standards of the era, vigorously pursued Barlow and bombarded him with ardent letters displaying a heavy-handed flirtatiousness. Barlow was attracted to her and flattered by her interest in his poetry, but apparently his romantic feelings began to wane, for Elizabeth complained of his lack of response. Whereas Elizabeth had flung herself at Barlow, Ruth Baldwin played the reluctant. It was ultimately she who won Barlow's heart; they married in 1781 and moved to Hartford in 1782.

Unfortunately for this theory, Elizabeth remained friendly with the Barlows. Her letters to them are light-hearted and playful; she speaks jokingly of her genteel poverty at the parsonage, she critiques Barlow's poetry, she shares gossip of mutual friends. Moreover, Barlow sailed for France on May 25, 1788, to work as a European agent for a company selling land in Ohio. Elizabeth knew that Barlow would be overseas for years, so it is doubtful that the deathbed letter was addressed to him.

Was the father perhaps an unknown Frenchman? There were many French officers from the staffs of Lafayette and Rochambeau in the United States following the War of Independence. According to local rumor, Elizabeth had written a message in chalk on the flagstones of the inn, but a young boy, not knowing its significance, rubbed it out. A distinguished man in military dress was said to have ridden up to the tavern looking for this message; not finding it, he rode off. Elizabeth spoke French fluently, and could have met a French officer at one of the many dances and balls held in Hartford. Brissot de Warville, a French Revolutionary leader, visited Connecticut in 1788 and wrote that the women of Hartford had "brilliant complexions" and a lack of inhibition with strangers. In comparison to young ladies of France, who were strictly chaperoned, "You see them [Connecticut young women] hazarding themselves alone, without protectors, in the public stagecoaches." Did this openness prove irresistible to some visiting French officer? Undoubtedly, Elizabeth's family would have strenuously opposed her marriage to a French Catholic.

Another candidate for the role of seducer is Elizabeth's distant cousin, Pierpont Edwards. Edwards was two years older than Elizabeth and, at the time of Elizabeth's pregnancy, had been married to his wife Frances for 19 years. He was the eleventh and youngest

child of Sarah Pierrepont and Jonathan Edwards. When Edwards was only eight he was orphaned—his father dying of a smallpox inoculation, his mother of dysentery. Edwards, along with several siblings, was sent to live in the crowded home of his eldest brother Timothy. The sudden upheavals in his early life, combined with the somewhat haphazard discipline in his brother's house, created a man possessed of facile charm, but without strong principles.

One can see in Edwards all the makings of a seducer—he was bright and mischievous, but also self-indulgent. As a lawyer, he had great success with juries. Although he had a solid career of public service as a legislator and judge of a U.S. District Court, his private life was less savory—in his will he mentions the illegitimate children he had fathered. He once asked his nephew, Aaron Burr, to arrange the “retreat” of one of the women he had made pregnant.

In June 1788, when Elizabeth had settled into the Bell Tavern in Danvers, Edwards was attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Mrs. Whitman wrote him asking if he knew where her daughter was; Edwards impatiently wrote back that he “wished to God he did.”

Was Pierpont Edwards indeed the father of Elizabeth Whitman's illegitimate child? Hannah Foster, in her novel, *The Coquette*, seems to base Major Sanford, the seducer of Eliza/Elizabeth, on Edwards. By marriage, Hannah Foster was a distant relation of Elizabeth; the two women also had mutual friends. By some means Foster may have become privy to information which led her to believe that Edwards was Elizabeth's lover.

Over the past two centuries, much of the tangible remains of Elizabeth Whitman has vanished or literally gone up in smoke. She burned the letters that might have revealed the name of her lover. Her portrait as well as much of her correspondence were destroyed in 1831 by a fire at the parsonage where she and her family had lived. Her tombstone has been nearly destroyed by scavengers. The Bell Tavern where she died was torn down in 1840. During the demolition, a teaspoon marked “E.W.” was found in the recess of the closet she had used. Even this small memento is gone—it was stolen from the Peabody Historical Society in 1976. □



A strip of wallpaper that had hung in Elizabeth Whitman's room in the Bell Tavern.

Review



▲ Mark Gottlieb, a native of Lorain, Ohio, has written for local magazines (Cleveland, Northern Ohio Live) since 1976 and was managing editor and later editor of Live. He has published two books, *America's Soapbox* (1987), a history of the City Club of Cleveland with coauthor Diana Tittle, and *The Lives of University Hospitals of Cleveland* (1991), a history of the local academic medical center on the occasion of its 125th anniversary.

The Magazine in America: 1741-1990, by John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 382 pp., \$35.00.

Mark Gottlieb

According to industry estimates, some 20,000 different magazines are currently being published in North America. This total includes news and information magazines, women's magazines, city and regional magazines, minority magazines and children's magazines, not to mention baseball, cat, computer, baby, horticulture, wedding, health, drag racing, and soap opera magazines.

It is no exaggeration to say that virtually every aspect of modern American life is chronicled to one degree or another by a magazine specific to its subject. Yet the current ubiquity of magazines tends to obscure the fact that periodicals were once a rare commodity in this country, and that their success is, in fact, a fairly recent phenomenon. It is also easy to forget how central to the cultural fabric of the country magazines have been: how they in many cases actually *defined* the culture, while in the process helping to tie together the disparate regions and peoples of a decidedly heterogeneous nation.

With their new book, *The Magazine in America: 1741-1990* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), historians John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman attempt to encompass within a single volume the entire two-hundred-and-fifty-year history of periodical publishing in this country. It is a tall order, as the authors themselves admit in the book's foreword; ideally, they say, "three or four more volumes" would be necessary to do justice to so broad a subject. Given that constraint, however, they have succeeded in assembling a fascinating collection of facts about the rise of the magazine in America. Unfortunately, those facts are presented in a way that—inadvertently, at least—should sound an alarm in the offices of every magazine publisher in the country.

The Magazine in America explores the earliest attempts to publish periodicals in the decades immediately prior to the Revolutionary War, follows the story through the early years of the new republic, the Civil War, and the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

when the first great explosion of mass-market publishing occurred. The book's principal focus, however, is on the broadening of the mass market after World War I and the spectacular growth of small-market publications in more recent years.

As might be expected, magazines in this country at first followed the example of their British predecessors: they were originally intended almost exclusively for members of the upper class, who were the individuals most likely to be literate and to have sufficient leisure time in which to read something other than an occasional verse from the Bible. The first magazine in America bore the unwieldy title of the *American Magazine, or a Monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies*. Its first issue was published February 13, 1741, by a Philadelphia printer named Andrew Bradford. The *American Magazine* was followed just three days later by Benjamin Franklin's *The General Magazine*, but the better part of the contents of these and other early periodicals consisted primarily of articles reprinted from British publications, with very few original or truly American contributions.

Domestic content of magazines increased after the Revolution and into the first half of the nineteenth century, while at the same time publishers began to address a broader and less rarefied audience. Yet despite the success of the five Harper brothers' *Harper's New Monthly*, which started in June of 1850, and the profusely illustrated and very popular *Leslie's Weekly* in 1855, no magazine was entirely American in content until the advent of the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, which was edited by James Russell Lowell and featured contributions from such home-grown literary lights as Hawthorne, Whittier, Thoreau, and even Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The earliest magazines concentrated most heavily on political topics, with literature—poetry, short stories, and serials—and the fine arts a close second. As American magazines matured, however, they began to cover a much wider range of subjects, and in doing so they touched the far corners of the country in a way that no local newspaper could. They disseminated information about everything from current events and political opinion to interior decoration and the latest in gentlemen's and ladies' fashion, and in the process they helped to mold the interests of the nation as a whole.

The common thread in the histories of the most successful magazines was the character of their founders and editors. Though wildly different in background and education, these men and women seemed to share the same instinctive feel for what the public wanted to read. Some were authentic geniuses, like Louis Godey and his editor, Sarah Josepha Hale, who in the middle of the nineteenth century made *Godey's Lady's Book* a phenomenally popular publica-

tion with both women and men. George Horace Lorimer tapped the growing middle-class market more effectively than any other publisher of his time with the much-loved *Saturday Evening Post*. And Frank Crowninshield's *Vanity Fair* and Harold Ross's *New Yorker* embodied an air of sophistication previously unseen in American publishing.

There was, of course, the occasional oddball in the mix: Bernarr Macfadden, the eccentric creator of *True Story* and *Physical Culture*, liked to don a leopard-skin loincloth to lead his employees in office calisthenics. But empires could be built by publishers who were particularly attuned to popular taste, as was *Argosy's* Frank Munsey, whose predatory hijinks earned him the nickname of the "Grand High Executioner of Journalism." William Randolph Hearst, Cyrus Curtis, Condé Nast, and Henry Luce all added to or made their fortunes with magazines.

The Magazine in America devotes ample attention to some of the watershed events in publishing, such as the birth of Luce's *Time* and the creation of Time, Incorporated. And much space is allotted to the story of *Reader's Digest*, which, not long after its introduction in 1922, surpassed the *Saturday Evening Post* in popularity and eventually became the magazine with the largest circulation in the world.

Of course, both *Time* and *Reader's Digest* made a virtue of brevity, and their success may well have marked the beginning of a trend that has only intensified in recent years. America started to become not an illiterate but an *abliterate* society, composed of individuals who *could* read but who simply avoided doing so, whether because they lacked the time or the inclination. This trend was further reinforced by the advent of Time, Inc.'s *Life* and Gardner Cowles' *Look*, which, in hindsight, might be considered the most influential magazines of the century. Each lent more importance to photographs than to words, and each often raised otherwise pointless events or unremarkable individuals to distinction by the mere fact of printing their pictures. *Life* and *Look* were, in the event, merely precursors of the logical extension of the trend toward abliteracy: television. Indeed, *People* magazine, which premiered in 1974, was designed quite deliberately to imitate television, and it has prospered ever since by making much of nothing.

It is not surprising, then, that magazines in the 1990s are starting to see an erosion of their hard-won bases of support. In terms of advertising pages, 1991 was the worst year in modern history, and many established publications have begun to experiment with format changes in a desperate attempt to regain reader interest and remain afloat. And of the 3000 new titles launched during the boom years of the 1980s, only one third still exist.

Will magazines survive in the Abliterate Society? The authors of *The Magazine in America* attempt no prognostications about the future of periodicals, but they do accidentally illustrate one possible outcome. They have written a book that is packed with interesting and valuable information, but they have managed to hide that information behind prose that often reads like the literary equivalent of razor wire.

Both authors brought impressive credentials to their effort. Tebbel, a former newspaper and magazine writer, is a past chairman of the Department of Journalism at New York University, while Zuckerman, a former Gannett Fellow in Media Studies at Columbia University, is now professor of Marketing at the State University of New York at Geneseo and a visiting professor at McGill University. Nevertheless, their writing is full of offenses against logic, grammar, and common sense.

Relatively minor errors, such as using "forecast" when they meant "foreshadow," or making reference to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Brains [sic] Trust," might be overlooked. More distracting, and confusing, is their habit of introducing individuals and events without bothering to identify them or put them into context. For example: "In a reprise of H.L. Mencken and his sale of the 'Hatrack' edition of the *American Mercury* in Boston . . ." is plopped down whole without ever identifying Mencken, his magazine, or the circumstances surrounding the so-called "Hatrack" edition." (It is also difficult to see how Mencken himself could be "reprised.")

The authors' collaborative writing style is often painfully obtuse. They are particularly enamored of the neuter pronoun, as evidenced by this sentence concerning the pre-Revolutionary War publisher Isaiah Thomas and his new magazine: "Involved as he was with the imminent revolution, Thomas kept it going only six months before he turned it over to another printer, but in that time and for nine months afterward, it printed a series of engravings by Paul Revere and articles about domestic events by some of the best writers and became the first periodical to use illustrations liberally." Perhaps the finest example of the authors' style, however, is found in their depiction of the death of *Time* magazine cofounder Britton Hadden: "Toward the end of 1928, Hadden was stricken with a streptococcus infection that affected his heart, and on the same day that he put the first issue of *Time* to bed, February 27, he died six years later, in 1929, at thirty-one."

Near the end of *The Magazine in America*, in a chapter called "New Horizons," the authors devote five paragraphs to the career of Christopher Whittle, the boy wonder from Knoxville, Tennessee, who became a multimillionaire by creating an assortment of

magazines aimed at readers between the ages of thirteen and thirty. In recent years Whittle has been experimenting with other methods of disseminating information—magazines designed for physicians' waiting rooms, for example, and an entirely new approach called "wall media," which are poster-size news broadsheets. Whittle's most controversial effort, however, has been Channel One, a televised news service for school classrooms that is offered to schools free of charge because its costs are covered by advertisers whose commercials regularly interrupt the broadcasts.

Many members of the educational establishment worry about the presence of advertising in a medium piped into the schools, but few seem particularly concerned about what should be a much more worrisome question: the ultimate effect of allowing television to "teach." Those educators who see nothing wrong with an innovation like Channel One might think twice if they were to take a look at *The Magazine in America*. As a reference volume, the book is a valuable tool, because it provides a starting point from which to explore in more depth the specific subjects it covers. Yet as a narrative history, it is a tragicomic illustration of what the future may hold for the Abliterate Society. If even established writers and multi-degreed academics can no longer produce understandable prose, what should be expected from a generation that will grow up with Channel One in the classroom? □



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