

No Smoking Section

Dining out in Bloomberg's New York

By Dana B. Vachon

LIKE SO MANY of my colleagues in finance, I was deeply impressed with *The Devil Wears Prada*. After reading this book, I began to feel that I owed it to society at large to pair up with a 24-year-old assistant fashion editor. Indeed, the worldview of Andrea Sachs, protagonist of that literary milestone, struck me as a warm womb into which I could crawl to pull an existential Rip Van Winkle. I would wake up in 2034 and find myself in divorce court, but the intervening decades would have been a great run of catty talk, misplaced priorities, and near total avoidance of angst and epiphany: the twin enemies of my own happiness. With this in mind, having heard that many in media often eat at Da Silvano, I made plans to dine there.

I sat in the outdoor section, where a cool breeze lapped across the street and rustled the blonde hair of the young women at the table next to mine. The moon was hanging low in the gray-blue night. Deep within my DNA an ancient chromosome wondered if it would be a good harvest this year. The whole scene was very outside.

I reached into my jacket pocket for the Dunhill Lights that I had bought to enjoy after dinner. (I had the rabbit. It was delicious.) I leaned my chair back into the early autumn evening. Smoking.

Suddenly, there appeared a tan, silver-haired gentleman in a vast, black, Tommy Bahama shirt. He seemed to run the place and insisted that I was in violation of the Bloomberg Edict Fiat Mandate against smoking in restaurants.

"But aren't we not so much inside of a

restaurant as outside of one?" I asked him.

"No!" he replied, "Here, you cannot smoke! This is not outside!" I pushed the metal chair back perhaps five feet from the table, out onto the sidewalk along Sixth Avenue.

"What about now? Is this outside?"

Pedestrians improvised mid-stride pirouettes to avoid tripping over me. A dog walked by. Like St. Francis of Assisi, who spent a lot of time outside, I petted that dog.

But the man was unconvinced and swung his arms in protest like a frustrated umpire, declaring now to the evening itself, "This is not outside! Please, put the cigarette out!"

I was surrounded by people walking up and down Sixth Avenue. How could they be outside and I be not outside? Where was I? The only option seemed to be that I was inside. But if I were inside, then everyone was inside. Because that is how logic works. I looked across the street and out into the vast indoors of lower Manhattan. Da Silvano was larger than I had ever previously imagined.

"How are you able to afford rent on all of this space?" I asked the man, taking a drag off my Dunhill. I wondered how I was able to get a reservation at such a crowded restaurant without faking an effeminate voice and pretending to be my own assistant. Which I never do.

He interrupted my thoughts. "If an inspector is here, there is a \$1000 fine! Three fines—no restaurant!" A very good point and a low blow. He was now accusing me of threatening his livelihood.

But I work at a large corporation and happen to know that nothing enhances an older man's livelihood like a young sycophant fluffing his ego. "Don't major media figures come here all the time? Do you think that Bloomberg would really want to bother you? It would be in the papers for weeks, and he doesn't need that."

Another drag off my cigarette. It was fast becoming the most interesting object in my possession, magically capable of redefining entire spaces. I tilted the smoke around my palate and glanced at the back of the cigarette package. I could not help but think how these superb cigarettes in their distinctive beveled-edge pack are made with superior-quality tobaccos to Dunhill's unique standards of perfection.

The gentleman was unflattered, and the smoldering end of the cigarette became for a moment the center of his universe. He gestured to it and made a sly attempt to escape my flattery by invoking guilt and paranoia.

"There could be an inspector here right now!"

He was good, but I was better. Raised Catholic during the Cold War, I am something of an expert on guilt and paranoia. I squinted my eyes, tilted my head at an angle, and pointed at him with the glowing cherry like a young Javert.

"What makes you so sure that I'm not an inspector?"

He was unimpressed and now just glared. I took a last drag of the cigarette and tossed it to the vast *al fresco* floor of Da Silvano. I stamped it out with my loafer and was filled with awe as it made contact with the magical indoor/outdoor Astroturf of Mayor Bloomberg's New York. ■

Dana B. Vachon writes from New York.

[burke, not trotsky]

What Conservatism Means

Hint: There's no such thing as creative destruction

By Owen Harries

JOHN STUART MILL famously dubbed the Conservative Party the “stupid party.” Mill was, of course, a liberal—but then so are most intellectuals. The English conservative, Roger Scruton, has recently written of his own experience growing up in the middle of the 20th century: “[A]lmost all English intellectuals regarded the term ‘conservative’ as a term of abuse. ... [it was] to be on the side of age against youth, the past against the future, authority against innovation ... spontaneity and life.”

As well as hostility, there is likely to be ignorance. Conservatism does not lend itself easily to schematic, didactic exposition, and conservatives do not readily engage in it. In introducing his anthology *The Conservative Tradition*, R.J. White defensively (or perhaps smugly and archly) claims, “To put conservatism in a bottle with a label is like trying to liquify the atmosphere or give an accurate description of the beliefs of a member of the Anglican Church. The difficulty arises from the nature of the thing. For conservatism is less a political doctrine than a habit of mind, a mode of feeling, a way of living.”

Bearing this resistance to formal treatment in mind, it is perfectly in character that what is widely accepted as the ablest and most influential statement of conservative views—Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*—is not a systematic statement of a position but a polemic reacting to a particu-

lar political situation: an unprecedented upheaval in the most illustrious and powerful country in Europe. Embedded therein, in unsystematic fashion, are the tenets of a political philosophy.

Two initial points about Burke's *Reflections*: first, it was published in 1790, before the most violent manifestations of the revolution—before the terror, the regicide, the revolution devouring its own children, and the emergence of a military dictatorship. Therefore, Burke was writing with foresight, not hindsight.

Second, at the time it was published, the revolution was still seen in England as an immense liberating step forward. Most are familiar with Wordsworth's “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive” reaction and that of Charles James Fox: “How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! And how much the best!” In launching his denunciation of the revolution, Burke was not

or “theoretical reasoning” as applied to social and political questions and his conviction of the danger of such applications. He was writing at a time when the revolutionaries in France seriously believed that they could reconstruct the world from scratch by the application of general, abstract principles—to the point of introducing a new calendar to mark the beginning of that new world. In holding this belief they were not exceptional but representative of the most sophisticated opinion of their time, putting into action belief about the power of reason that representatives of the Enlightenment had energetically propagated. Burke rejected that belief for two reasons, the first having to do with the nature of society and politics, the second with the nature of human beings and their rational faculties.

When he wrote the *Reflections*, Burke had been engaged in politics at a high level for three decades. He saw that

IN DENOUNCING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, BURKE WAS NOT EXPRESSING POPULAR OPINION BUT GOING AGAINST THE TIDE.

expressing a popular opinion among thinking Englishmen but rather going against the tide.

Central to his reaction was a profound hostility toward what he called variously “speculation,” “metaphysics,”

activity as an infinitely complex, difficult, and delicate one. The factors at work were many, and the ways they interrelated were complex. Politicians had to act in concrete, discrete situations, not in general or abstract areas.