

testimonies that still circulate regarding exactly when, and at whose hands, Mussolini perished—could have been an excellent one but for its periodic lapses into carelessness, at which nothing in Moseley's life of Ciano (*Mussolini's Shadow*) had hinted. The Abyssinian campaign, which Moseley assigns to 1938, had finished two years earlier. Claus von Stauffenberg, *pace* Moseley, was shot rather than hanged. On no fewer than four occasions Franco is labeled "Fascist." And concerning Moseley's description of Mussolini as "the greatest disaster to befall [Italy] in the 20th century," it is easy to list several likelier contenders than the *Duce* for this title. We need merely recollect the Red Brigade; the Mafia, suppressed by Fascism, only to revive exuberantly in the Allies' wake; and the 1978 legalizing (by a Catholic prime minister, at that) of abortion, resulting in today's population implosion and total failure of Italian citizens to outbreed their country's Third World Muslim invaders. If probable as well as actual disasters merit consideration, we can also cite the continuance of that Red terror against which pre-Mussolini cabinets had proven completely impotent in 1920-1922. Any knowledge of Spain in the 1930s, or of Portugal before Salazar's advent, confirms the silliness of hoping that interwar Southern European liberals could maintain the most elementary public order when threatened from the Left. Such complaints aside, Moseley is still recommendable to anyone interested in this under-chronicled area of Italian politics. ■

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[*Confessions of an Heiress: A Tongue-in-Chic Peek Behind the Pose*, Paris Hilton, Fireside, 178 pages]

Confessions of An Heir-head

By John Carney

I FIRST BECAME AWARE of Paris Hilton through the gossip pages of the *New York Post*. A column called Page Six (which never actually appears on the sixth page of the tabloid) seemed to present her as a modern-day member of the bottle-green-bowler set from Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, her life consisting entirely of parties at New York and Hollywood nightclubs. She seemed not so much glamorous as totally ridiculous.

Paris agrees. "In fact, pretty much everything I read about myself is totally ridiculous. Newspapers and magazines write that I'm spoiled and privileged, and that all I do is dance on tabletops and party with my friends," she writes in the opening paragraph of *Confessions of an Heiress*.

I had assumed that Paris was named for the famously adulterous son of Troy in a sort of classicist-feminist prank by her parents that implied their daughter was to be the judge of beauty in the world rather than just an object in the contest. As a middle-class, Catholic New Yorker with a questionable education, I found this reassuring. It meant that the upper-class had, well, class—an acquaintance with the Greco-Roman sources of our civilization so thorough that they could make clever jokes at the expense of the lower orders, who would only know Paris as that place where people like John Kerry. As Paris writes, "People need to believe your life is better than theirs."

If it was hard to connect this presumed learnedness with the Paris of Page Six, perhaps it was just that the down-market tabloid had misunderstood an appreciation for the Greek practice of the symposium, taking it for simple hedonism. Paris was often seen

but rarely quoted, and it was possible that she was whispering Socratic irony into the ears of her fellow party-hopping heiresses. This possibility was intentionally cultivated. "The way I keep people wondering about me is to smile as much as possible and say as little as possible," she confesses.

This impression of Paris was reinforced by her selection of the Christian genre of confession for her first book. Echoing Saint Augustine's story of his journey from sin to embrace of the grace of God, the title *Confessions of an Heiress* holds out the promise of a cultivated, even spiritual book. Indeed, *Confessions* is centrally concerned with sin. "There is no sin worse in life than being boring—and nothing worse in life than letting other people tell you what to do," writes Paris. It is the conquest of Paris over the sin of dullness and the temptation of obedience that animates her writing.

If you are having trouble imagining "being boring" as a sin, much less the worst sin, you are not alone. No branch of Christianity of which I am aware treats being boring as damnable. (Although, on reflection, this would explain the snake handling, mega-churches, and feverish support for America's wars in the Middle East that characterize certain branches of Christianity.) I found it a helpful mental exercise to imagine the nadir of Dante's *Inferno* as written by Paris in perhaps her next literary venture. In the hell for the boring, we would find neither Brutus nor Judas but Alan Greenspan dwelling around Satan's nether regions. But since being boring and obedience have become sins, Satan himself has been paroled from hell. The mercy of Paris is great.

If these look like the moral priorities of someone whose education has come entirely from gossip pages, there is little in *Confessions* to suggest otherwise. When traveling, Paris tries to "buy as many gossip magazines as possible, and start the trip by reading everything in the world that's recently been written about me." Our confessing heiress seems unaware of any wider world of culture or literature, and after reading her book

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I suspect that this is because so little culture or literature is about her. This is a unique misanthropy: other people are boring, boring is sin, so hell is other people. If her parents are anything like their daughter, I can no longer maintain the hope that she was named for Homer's Trojan troublemaker. It seems far more likely that she was simply named for, well, the Hilton hotel in France's capital.

I'm not being entirely fair. In a sidebar toward the end of *Confessions*, Paris writes, "Contrary to what people think, I do read a lot. I love Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* and *Four Blondes*, *Maneater* by Gigi Levangie Grazer, Plum Sykes's *Bergdorf Blondes*, the *Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Betina Zikha's *Ultimate Style: the Best of the Best Dressed List*, and anything by Jackie Collins." I will allow the charitable assumption that Paris does not love these books because they remind her of Paris (or because so many of the novels can be read by renting the DVD). And I will not speak about the literary quality of these books. For all I know, *Bergdorf Blondes* could be the *Brothers Karamazov* of pill-

popping, wealthy New York blondes obsessed with shopping. But even Jay Gatsby had a library full of books. They were unread, the pages uncut, but they were there in his house because he felt he needed to appear cultured.

Paris has shrugged off this burden. There are no references to the arts, history, or sciences unless mentioning Gucci and G-5 private jets counts. There are a lot of parties. One begins to wonder if the famous Paris smile is less a Mona Lisa mystery and more the eternal sunshine of a spotless mind. She may find Page Six's portrayal of her life ridiculous, but it is the mirror image of the Paris portrayed in *Confessions*. From the evidence of *Confessions*, Paris the author's attitude toward literature is best captured in the words of her dog Tinkerbelle, who has published his own highly entertaining memoir, *The Tinkerbelle Hilton Diaries*, as told to D. Resin. "Let's stop lording that literacy thing over everybody," Tinkerbelle writes. "You don't have a sex life like the rest of us do, we get it already."

"There has always been a privileged class in America, but it has never been so dangerously isolated from its surroundings," the late Christopher Lasch wrote in *The Revolt of the Elites*. Lasch was writing about an aristocracy of brains with little connection to the historic, rooted America. Although she is absolutely isolated, Paris—and I'll be gentle—makes an improbable representative of the aristocracy of intellect.

What does she represent? Not an elite so much as the ruins of an elite whose time has passed. The process James Burnham described in 1949's *The Managerial Revolution*, whereby the capitalists cede control of the means of production to bureaucratic managers, renders the surviving capitalists as a highly adapted species who have lost their evolutionary niche. They are people without purpose, which begins to explain Paris's idea of sin. Boredom becomes a serious problem, indeed the only serious problem, when responsibility is delegated to experts. As Jefferson said, "I study war so that my children

can study commerce, and their children philosophy and poetry." If we project forward from this trend, the end of this line is Paris studying parties.

Or perhaps pornography. Apart from her two seasons on a Fox television series in which Paris and a friend encounter middle Americans with "comic" results, Paris is best known as the star of a sex tape, a pornographic video featuring her encounters with a man several years her senior that is widely available on the internet. According to the London tabloids, there are more such tapes on the way. Of course, there is no mention of this in the book, although Paris finds it necessary to allude to it at one point because the incident resulted in her hosting an episode of "Saturday Night Live." Like Bill Clinton, she expertly avoids the sources of her notoriety while discussing its repercussions.

For all its relentless focus on Paris, there is surprisingly little by way of biography in *Confessions*. She is the great-granddaughter of Conrad Hilton, the son of a Norwegian immigrant and founder of the Hilton hotel chain. Paris grew up in New York City's Waldorf-Astoria as a sort of real life Eloise, spent her summers in the Hamptons (the modern day equivalent of Jay Gatsby's East Egg), and now lives in Los Angeles. Presumably she went to school somewhere and later worked as a fashion model rather than going to college. There are few biographical clues to explain how Paris came to be the young woman she is today.

Her brief discussion of her family, however, provides an innovative response to political philosopher John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, which proposes that the best society is the one we would choose if we did not know what talents and family connections we would have in life. "I believe you choose who you're born to," Paris writes. Accordingly, there is no such thing as undeserved fortune. To err may be human, but to be an heiress is simply a matter of choosing to be born into the right family. ■

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The Real Deal



Having to choose between George W. Bush and John Kerry is like navigating between Scylla and Charybdis. On one side lurks the hoary beast of a

decent man brought down by the neo-cons and their agenda of world domination. On the other churns the vortex of a man who is right on nothing and is willing to betray anyone—as he did his fellow soldiers, sailors, and Marines when he painted them as war criminals—in order to achieve recognition and high office. It is obviously a very difficult choice, so I will take the third way. But first, as my colleague Pat Buchanan states in his endorsement of the president, “Bush is right on taxes, judges, sovereignty, and values. Kerry is right on nothing.” So why not Bush? Why not do, as Pat says, what the pirate Jean Lafitte did when he asked to fight alongside his countrymen against the Redcoats in the Battle of New Orleans? I am, after all, a lifelong conservative Republican.

The answer is that the party of Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and William F. Buckley Jr., a party motivated by libertarian impulses and deep convictions about personal freedoms, ain’t no more. Since when is a Leviathan federal government with a record deficit a conservative Republican one? How does a Bush administration supposedly committed to ideas like limited government, personal freedom, and a balanced budget explain a \$450 billion budget deficit, the loss of American manufacturing jobs, and the promise of an amnesty for illegal aliens? How can the party of Robert A. Taft excuse the catastrophic war against Iraq and the idea that those who opposed it to are traitors, an accusation Pat, Scott, and I were tarred with by Ariel Sharon’s agent David Frum?

The words of Gen. George C. Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army during World War II, come to mind: “I would be loath to hazard American lives for purely political purposes.” Yet Bush continues to heed men whose policies have radicalized the Mideast and converted much of the Islamic world into a giant recruiting station for Osama bin Laden. As Buchanan wrote recently, the Republican Party is now the party of big business, big government, and big war.

Tom DeLay is a disgrace, a brutal fund-raiser who resembles Robert Torricelli and Alfonse D’Amato, not what a conservative Republican House majority leader should be in my book. Once upon a time, conservatives believed in ideas and individualism, now it seems money and power are what counts. So despite his personal decency, I cannot in all honesty endorse Bush for a second term.

Kerry, of course, is far worse, a disaster in the making. Not only has he dismissed the president’s promises to enact amnesty for illegal aliens as insufficient, he has vowed to sign an amnesty within his first 100 days in office. Again, as Pat writes in his endorsement of the president, the people on Kerry’s side are all those I despise, the George Soros, Barbra Streisands, and Michael Moores of this world. What unites the Kerry army is hate for George W. Bush. Marching under the Michael Moore banner, they have no message except to get rid of the 43rd president. If this is a policy, I’m Monica Lewinsky. Their self-righteous anger is negative and as dishonest as John Kerry’s false populism. Signing

the Kyoto Protocol and adhering to the rules of the International Criminal Court will only weaken America and yield national sovereignty.

Which brings me to my choice, Michael Anthony Peroutka. Yes, I know, it sounds like a wasted vote, but is it? He is the nominee of a small third party called the Constitution Party. The point of voting for Peroutka is to help create an alternative. After all, there has to be a start somewhere and adhering to the Constitution as Peroutka advocates is a pretty good way to begin.

Peroutka defines his party as a Christian one dedicated to preserving the foundations on which the American Republic was based. He is predictably against abortion and gay marriage. Peroutka is also opposed to mass immigration, and he strongly supports national sovereignty. As Samuel Francis has written, Peroutka “is a charming and decent man of deep convictions and principle, has a ready grasp of the principles he supports and knows how to explain them.”

As it happens, *National Review* was founded 50 years ago next year. If anything, it looked like a quixotic effort at its birth. Yet 25 years later, Bill Buckley and his crew had managed to sweep Ronald Reagan into office. Peroutka’s presidential bid looks just as idealistic, perhaps even more so. What is a conservative Republican to do except send a message and, in the words of Buckley, yell “Stop” to runaway government?

Without big ideas, elections become about personalities—popularity contests, nothing more. Both major candidates are filching each others’ rhetoric and pandering. All that matters is the sell, not the content. Kerry is an opportunist *sans pareil*, Bush a man under the wrong influence. Vote for the real deal, Michael Anthony Peroutka. ■