writings. In "Why I Am a Republican and a Conservative,' Tonsor wrote, "We have, as Republicans, always believed that we must convince the outside world of the blessing of the American system by our example rather than by the force of arms… . We, as Republicans… must be prepared to fight, but only when our national interest is involved… I have not always been a Republican, though I think it unlikely that I shall ever cease now to be one. … I am a Republican in politics because I believe in nonintervention in foreign affairs …" "We must not become the policeman of the world. Our interest in the Third World must be predicated on the idea of benign neglect." These first sentences are taken from Tonsor's unpublished papers, the last two from a publication less than five years ago. Allow me to wonder: what does Stephen Tonsor, Republican and conservative, think now? ■

John Lukacs is the author of Remembered Past: John Lukacs on History, Historians, and Historical Knowledge.

MOVING?

Changing your address?

Simply go to **The American Conservative** website, **www.amconmag.com.** Click "subscribe" and then click "address change."

To access your account make sure you have your TAC mailing label. You may also subscribe or renew online.

If you prefer to mail your address change send your TAC label with your new address to:

The American Conservative
Subscription Department
P.O. Box 9030
Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030

[Christina, Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric, Veronica Buckley, Fourth Estate, 384 pages]

The Cat-and-Mouse Queen

By R.J. Stove

SOME NATIONS FORGET NOTHING; others forget everything. Squarely in the first group is France, whose entire political life for two centuries has been a series of footnotes to the Revolution, and where even such unanticipated modern horrors as a huge Islamic immigrant underclass are still defended by pious governmental bluster about the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Squarely in the second group is Sweden, whose pre-modern self is at such variance with its modern self that it seems to inhabit not merely a different age but a different planet. When one contemplates Sweden's public image of today—a lukewarm welfarist despotism tempered by assassination, a land at once Erastian and atheistic, a society passionless even in its sexual manias—it requires a heroic paradigm shift to envisage Sweden as (a) a swashbuckling military power, (b) feared by every other regime in Europe, and (c) so inflamed by theological disputes as to resemble some latter-day Protestant version of Byzantium. Yet such Sweden was.

At no time did Swedes inspire more fear, hatred, and respect than in the 17th century. And no Swedish monarch ever inspired more amazement, distrust, and devotion than Christina, who succeeded to the Swedish throne in 1632 at the age of six; who abandoned that throne in 1654; and who died 35 years afterwards, as object a lesson as any King Lear in the dangers of combining power mania with self-abasement mania.

Christina's father, Gustavus Adolphus—"the Lion of the North"—fell in that most Pyrrhic among victories, the battle of Lützen, which left the Swedish army triumphant but its leader a corpse, slain, some said, by his own troops. To the particular sufferings of life in the paternal shadow of a military genius, Christina added the more generalized miseries of the deformed. "As a baby she had apparently been dropped," Veronica Buckley tells us, "and her injuries had left her noticeably lopsided in the upper body, with one shoulder higher than the other; the portraits show her in tactful semi-profile." Unable to ingratiate by her appearance, Christina sought to overawe by her learning and emerged from her curriculum's severity with what could well have been the best classical education any of her compatriots had yet attained. Her intellect never failed her, though her common sense often did.

All her life Christina derived a kind of gymnastic pleasure from pretending—to herself as to others—that two and two could equal anything from three to 428, that the straight should be crooked, that the plain places should be rough, and that the shortest distance between two points was a spiral. Such a mind as hers will almost always succeed in local politics, however much it fails on a wider stage. So in Christina's case. Sweden's redoubtable prime minister, Axel Oxenstierna, had enjoyed almost absolute status as Gustavus Adolphus's confidant; the young queen cut Oxenstierna down to the size of a mere *primus inter pares*, while retaining a certain fondness for him. For years she kept her cousin and chief suitor, Karl Gustavus, dangling with a "will I, won't I" campaign of meticulous indirection, which managed both to guarantee his interest in marrying her and to render any such marriage impossible.

Buckley maintains that "Christina's hesitancy was not the result of callousness ... not a cat-and-mouse game," but one would like further data to substantiate this character reference since cat-and-mouse games exercised so overwhelming an allure over her at every other stage of her career. In any event, Karl Gustavus could not have held her attention, let alone her love, for long. Universally esteemed as a military

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strategist, he remained—by Christina's exacting standards, anyhow—rather a bore, entirely unable to share his sovereign's metaphysical and artistic obsessions. He would never have forced Descartes to visit Stockholm in the middle of a pitiless Swedish winter, as Christina famously did, killing off the great philosopher in the process.

Rumors of the queen's religious deviations within a Lutheran stronghold continued to pullulate. Scarcely had she begun to reign as an adult than she flirted with the idea of abdication. Plans to wed her to the Elector of Brandenburg's son—and by this means to gain for Sweden mastery of the Baltic Sea—had run aground, thanks mostly to her determined piloting. Swedish law made Catholicism a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment and sometimes by the scaffold. Forbidden fruit invariably thrilled Christina's nerves. Undergoing Catholic instruction in secret, from foreign Jesuits, became addictive to one as naturally conspiratorial as the queen. Meanwhile, although Descartes might be dead, she still surrounded herself with other Frenchmen, who unlike Descartes prided themselves on their open impiety. Even as she slyly wooed Jesuit interlocutors to her court, her agents pursued for her much subversive literature. This included a notoriously blasphemous book called *The Three Impostors*, which Emperor Frederick II was accused of having written in the early 13th century (the "impostors" concerned being Moses, Christ, and Muhammad), and which Christina never succeeded in tracking down. Catholicism's pyramidal governance made, for her, a welcome contrast with Protestant states, where an impudent gentry seemed always able to grab power. She found Charles I's decapitation especially shocking, though later she received with every sign of enthusiasm Cromwell's ambassador, Bulstrode Whitelocke. Yet Buckley demonstrates that Catholicism's chief merit, for Christina, lay in its appeal to her aesthetic sense. Mediterranean culture captivated her as Scandinavian Lutheranism never could. "O for a beaker full of the warm South" sums up the queen's attitude.

By 1654, even her formidable powers of domestic pretense had worn thin. At a solemn ceremony that year in Uppsala's castle, Christina divested herself of office—only with considerable delay could two noblemen be persuaded to take the crown from her head—and named Karl Gustavus as her successor. During her restless self-imposed exile, Christina wore (to quote Buckley again) "flat men's shoes, often boots, and frequently a sword … [h]er speech would grow coarser and her habits rougher." Even in her homeland she had scorned feminine caution, riding maniacally on horseback. Now, with her mannish attire, uncouth postures, and increasing taste for the most ferocious swearing—delivered in a gruff, vehement baritone—she looked and sounded like a freak. Gossip charged her with lesbianism, even with hermaphroditism; the likeliest guess is that physical relations, particularly with males, repelled her. "I could never bear," she once complained, "to be used by a man the way a peasant uses his fields." Certainly she displayed, like many another asexual before and since, untiring zest for dirty talk. Such talk helped to perpetuate her skill as a publicity genius: a singular achievement for anyone in the age of Louis XIV.

Her new faith's highest officials puzzled over what to do with her. Soon after she formally embraced Catholicism (in Brussels) she "spoke laughingly of the Catholic belief in transubstantiation," thereby inspiring fears that she had intended her conversion as an elaborate prank. Intermittent pontifical rebukes failed to impress someone who appears to have considered her own rightful role in the hierarchy as being that of Pope Christina I. In her long—and probably platonic—relationship with the ambitious young cardinal Decio Azzolino, she indubitably fancied herself as pope-maker. Simultaneously, she harbored a fierce ambition to dominate secular politics, or at least a substantial corner thereof.

Within three years of quitting Sweden, she aimed to rule Spanish-controlled

Missing Any Issues of The American Conservative?

Order copies today.

$6 per issue postage paid.
Please indicate quantity:

October 7, 2002
___ Vol 1, No. 1 — First Issue!

December 2, 2002
___ Norman Mailer on Empire

March 24, 2003
___ Whose War?

February 2, 2004
___ Cheney Builds an Empire

March 15, 2004
___ Gibson's Passion

April 26, 2004
___ Pinocchio Presidency

July 5, 2004
___ Reagan Commemorative Issue

September 27, 2004
___ Where the Right Went Wrong

___ All 6 issues published in 2002
___ All 24 issues published in 2003
___ All 24 issues published in 2004

Name ____________________
Please print
Address ____________________
City ____________________
State ____________________
Zip ____________________
TAC50912

Send your order with payment to:
The American Conservative
1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120
Arlington, VA 22209

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Naples. Cardinal Mazarin originally gave her to understand that France would support her aim. He scuttled away from this vague assurance once Gian-Rinaldo Monaldeschi, a quick-witted and mischief-making favorite of Christina's, revealed to Spain's government details of her plans. Christina obtained revenge by having Monaldeschi murdered, with many a refinement of torture, in the château where she was Louis XIV's guest. Louis would probably have been content to see Christina arrange a dozen killings, provided she did not frighten the horses; but carrying out a private execution on France's royal property transcended permissible behavior, and Christina's Neapolitan dreams abruptly ended.

Subsequently she looked east. In 1667 some hoped, and others feared, that the Polish king Jan Kazimierz would marry her; the subservient role of queen-consort she rejected with scorn, thereby having once again—in Buckley's brisk phrase—"allowed her pride to obstruct her better interest." When Jan Kazimierz resigned his office a year later, Poland suddenly struck her as wildly attractive. She had long-standing family connections to the place; she shared its people's religion; various Vatican bureaucrats favored her installation in Warsaw, if only to get her out of their hair. Nevertheless her schemes for the Polish throne also came to nothing. Ultimately she could not bear to part from Azzolino for good: besides which, Poland's magnates wanted a man in the top job, and for this desire they regarded even the baritonal Christina as an inadequate substitute.

So Christina stayed mostly in Rome thereafter, cultivating eminent sculptors and composers (Bernini, Arcangelo Corelli, and Alessandro Scarlatti, *inter alia*), adding to her formidable collection of primarily Italian paintings, and at last more or less tolerating her political impotence. Always prone to the wiles of dexterous but worthless men, as the Monaldeschi affair had confirmed, she fell in her late middle age for a real shocker: Miguel de Molinos, the Spanish priest who founded Quietism. Molinos insisted that his brand of contemplation rendered conventional Catholic penances redundant, and furthermore, that if one's soul attained the desired state of total passivity before God, one could sin unpunished, since the sin would occur without one's own consent. Eventually the papal Inquisition clapped Molinos into jail, but Christina still defended his aberrations. Any teaching that removed a human intermediary between herself and God was, in her eyes, commendable. She expired in 1689 after one last prodigious outburst of queenly wrath, and she rests in St. Peter's Basilica.

A strange narrative altogether, told with flawless grace by Buckley, whose literary debut this is, and who should be urged to write many more biographies. Christina's tale compels study both for its insights into Europe's post-Renaissance intrigue and for the luridly spotlit figure of its heroine. Whereas Oxenstierna emerges as an archetypal 17th-century statesman—a recognizable contemporary of Cromwell and Richelieu — Christina has more in common with our own *Zeitgeist* than with hers. Single-handedly, without even fully discerning what she wrought, she invented that quintessential manifestation of ideological modernism: the cafeteria Catholic, an intellectual camp-follower, ignoring all dogmas arduous enough to ensure fashionable disapproval; reducing religious doctrine to ethical platitudes; openly derisive of papal claims upon the believer's conscience; yet marked by a certain literary flair, genuinely in love with Catholic real estate, and apt to rage at even the mildest accusation of heterodox thought. Except for her utterly conventional acceptance of the "divinity [that] doth hedge a king," and her consequent lack of interest in exporting Whiggish democracy abroad, a reincarnated Christina would find her soulmate in Michael Novak. On this ground alone, she deserves American readers' attention. ■

R.J. Stove lives in Melbourne, Australia.

[The Letters of Robert Lowell, Saskia Hamilton, ed., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 852 pages]

Life Studies in Letters

By Thomas Dineen

Our end drifts nearer,
The moon lifts,
Radiant with terror.
The state
Is a diver under a glass bell.

—Robert Lowell, from "Fall 1961"

SHOULD WE CARE what a great poet thinks of the state or its wars? Virgil's patriotic *Aeneid* complemented the imperial ambitions of Augustus. More recent verse has treated nationalism with irony, sometimes situational as well as intentional: during World War I, Wilfred Owen penned the antiwar gem "Dulce Et Decorum Est," only to die in battle a week before the Armistice.

Robert Lowell (1917-77) had a particularly modern reaction to war and the politics that propelled it: resistance and rejection. Dismayed at the many civilian casualties of Allied bombing campaigns, he refused to serve and was jailed as a conscientious objector during World War II. In the late '60s, Lowell frequently appeared at antiwar rallies, deplored nuclear weapons, and yet paradoxically declared himself an "anarchical conservative."

Who was this contradictory character, who wrote some of the best poetry of the last century? These letters are an unselfconscious autobiography—a candid glimpse of what Lowell really felt about his friends, literature, and world affairs. Paleoconservatives will appreciate some of Lowell's nuanced political positions, and admirers of his writing will find at least as much of the real Lowell in his letters as was revealed in Ian Hamilton's excellent 1982 biography.

One is immediately struck by how

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED