

today who know more about William's political corruption and erotic perversions than Macaulay ever knew or we ever wanted to know. Rather, it is that despite his weaknesses, Macaulay remains compulsively readable and at times profound. His summary of the historian's function packs as much wisdom into one sentence as others have dragged out over several dozen pages:

The real use of ... studying the annals of past times, is to preserve men from the contraction of mind which those can hardly escape whose sole communion is with one generation and one neighborhood, who arrive at conclusions by means of an induction not sufficiently copious, and who therefore constantly confound exceptions with rules, and accidents with essential properties.

For all his biases, Macaulay sought the truth. No wonder Churchill resented him. A thinker who risked ostracism by rebuking Queen Victoria to her face—when Her Majesty referred to her “ancestor” James II, Macaulay shot back: “Not Your Majesty’s ancestor, Your Majesty’s predecessor”—would hardly have taken the 20th century’s blood-drenched Caesars at their own ethical rating had he lived to witness them.

Before he could finish his *History of England*, Macaulay died on Dec. 28, 1859. No latter-day chronicler can hope to equal the exquisite closing paragraph of Bryant’s biography:

They found him sitting upright in his chair, with a book still open at his side. The heart had stopped, and the historian had become part of that which he had made it his business to record. ■

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[*Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City* by Greg Grandin]

## Burning Rubber

Henry Ford’s jungle book

By Septimus Waugh

IN AN INTERVIEW with the *Texas Observer* in 2006, Greg Grandin complained, “History is abused in all sorts of ways by those who want to reduce every issue or conflict to its barest emotional simplicity in order to justify American power in the world.” He was, of course, referring to the neocons and their antics in South America and the Middle East. Grandin has been a longstanding critic in books such as *Empire’s Workshop* and *The Last Colonial Massacre*, as well as in his work for the UN Truth Commission on the Guatemalan civil war.

One might think that he would turn from such grim topics with a light heart to the description of Henry Ford’s failed attempt to bring civilization to the Amazon in exchange for rubber. And he has, to a degree. *Fordlandia*, his account of the doomed founding of two Ford towns in Brazil, is written with a flair and deftness that one might expect to find in a well-crafted novel, yet a darker theme prevails.

The story starts with that favorite Hollywood villain: the Englishman. In 1876, Henry Wickham, a ne’er-do-well British wanderer, smuggled 70,000 Hevea seeds from the Amazon to Kew Gardens, a service for which he received a knighthood from Queen Victoria. Hevea, the tree that produces latex, is native only to the Amazon. As the industrialized world’s appetite for rubber rocketed in the second half of the 19th century, the

Amazon experienced a latex-led boom. Rubber profits turned Manaus into a center of culture. But this did not last because latex grown in the jungle could only be sourced—“tapped” is the phrase—inefficiently, whereas the wicked British with their stolen seeds were able to grow Hevea on great plantations in their Far Eastern colonies. By 1923, the rubber production of the British Empire had outstripped that of the Amazon by a factor of almost ten.

This is where Henry Ford, with his ideals and his prejudices, comes in. There does not seem to have been much to Ford except work and more work before he founded his Ford Company in 1903. Then he started to voice his homespun philosophy: cars would end conflicts because people would travel and get to understand each other. “Happiness is on the road,” he said, chorusing Mr. Toad. “I am on the road, and I am happy.”

Ford reached the peak of his powers in his fifties, when he invented the production line and standardized the parts of the Model T, driving down the price of automobile production. He raised his workers’ wage to a minimum of \$5 a day, enabling them to buy the cars they produced.

With Ford’s success came a certain hubris: he hired an ocean liner to travel to Europe on a mission to convince the British and German empires that they

should desist from war. They did not listen. At this stage of his life, Ford's opinions would not sound out of place in contemporary America. He was a suffragist and a pacifist and also a keen recycler. (Even the boats that took the first cargoes to Fordlandia were converted from scrapped vessels.) Ford hated government and banks, which he blamed for promoting war and empire.

So when it came to his attention that the rubber trade was not only dominated by British estates in the Far East but that colonial merchants had supplanted the

because they produced only milk; he preferred soybeans that could be used for making plastic as well. "The cow is the crudest machine in the world," he said. "Our laboratories have already demonstrated that cow's milk can be done away with and the concentration of the elements of milk can be manufactured into food by scientific machines far cleaner than cows." Above all, Ford was shocked to discover that while in the U.S. high wages ensured attendance at work, in the Amazon they encouraged absenteeism.

## FORD HAD HOPED THAT THE AMAZONIAN NATIVES WOULD LEARN SQUARE DANCING IN EVENING SESSIONS AT THE TOWN HALL.

Amazon rubber trade, Ford saw a chance to put his ideas into practice. He would create a civilized rubber-producing settlement in Brazil, complete with American-style bungalows, street lighting, and a hospital. An area of forest would be cleared, the timber put to good use, and a large Hevea-producing region would be planted. The Ford Company would offer the Amazonian rubber tappers proper wages and inculcate them with the values of small-town America. "In his more utopian moments," says Grandin, "he envisioned a world in which industry and agriculture could exist in harmony with factories providing seasonal labor for farmers and industrial markets for agricultural products like soybeans."

None of it worked. The tappers' way of life proved incompatible with Fordism. They only tapped part-time and chose to practice animal husbandry. They did not want to give up their homesteads for full-time employment. But the Ford organization, while it encouraged horticulture among its workers, did not like the messy nature of small-scale livestock rearing. Ford abhorred cows

So the Ford Company abandoned its ideals and imported labor from the West Indies and elsewhere. But these workers brought their own problems: prostitution, gonorrhea, and loose dancing—the samba to be precise. Ford had hoped that the Amazonian natives would learn square dancing in evening sessions at the town hall.

The problems presented by the work force were as nothing compared to the difficulties created by the trees. Hevea thrived in large plantations in the Far East, where there were no pests or fungi. In the Amazon, these indigenous diseases, which had kept Hevea growth in check in the wild, ran riot when the trees were concentrated in plantations. Nine years after the founding of Fordlandia, the Ford Company, defeated by the terrain and the damp, moved its rubber-growing project to Belterra, where the land was drier and flatter. Yet even here the rubber project was not successful enough to warrant continuance. In 1945, after another nine years, Ford gave up the project completely and handed both Fordlandia and Belterra to the Brazilian government.

The most baffling element in this story is that such a foolish and appalling man as Ford could have founded a hugely successful industry and inspired so much loyalty among his workers. In Brazil, he was dubbed the "Jesus of Industry." In the U.S., he was likened by his employees to a Moses leading them toward the Promised Land. Yet Ford was quite clearly a destructive character: he subscribed wholeheartedly to the ideas expressed in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and had an intensely vindictive relationship with his son Edsel.

In his descriptions of Ford operatives wrestling with Amazonian and Brazilian society, Grandin conveys immediacy and excitement. With a light ironic touch, he brings to life the rogues and cranks who animate his tale. But beneath his history of Ford's adventures in the jungle and the recounting of the tycoon tyrant's dreams and caprices, readers will discern an undercurrent of criticism for globalized capitalism and for the part that the U.S. has played in its development. This theme emerges more distinctly in an excellent last chapter, which ties the threads together. "Even as Ford was preaching his gospel of 'high wages to create large markets,'" as Grandin puts it, "Fordism as an industrial method was making the balanced, whole world Ford longed for impossible to achieve. Today the link between production and consumption, and between good pay and big markets, has been broken, invalidated by the global extension of the logic of the assembly line." For Grandin, the world is a much worse place now than it was in Henry Ford's times—a view that will be shared by many readers. For we are all Fordlandians now. ■

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# Friendly Ghosts

Ours is an October house, shrouded by spreading maples. Its creaky floorboards of pine and chestnut were hewn in the 1830s, as Upstate New York was

ablaze with the religious and reform manias through which we earned the appellation of the “Burned-Over District.” Ancient spiderwebs lattice the basement. (I really should knock them down, but then where would the ancient spiders live?) The previous owner, a willowy eccentric, assured us that “pixies and fairies frolic in the garden,” but aside from a few house guests, I’ve yet to see that. Nor have I seen a ghost, even though for nigh unto a century our county’s leading spiritualists called this their earthly home.

When we moved in 17 autumns ago, my wife and I read aloud *Dracula*. The only other auditor was our lab-mutt puppy, who, thus forewarned, never did become a biter. (When our infant daughter came home from the hospital two winters later, I walked her to sleep to Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*. Okay, so it’s not *Goodnight, Moon*, but at least it ain’t *Blood Meridian*.)

My parents order the same breakfasts at the same diners on the same days every single week, and I suppose I have inherited this orderliness in my seasonal reading habits. Come October, I take the same old friends off the bookshelf. I could no more grow tired of them than I could be bored by the resplendent reds and oranges of an Upstate fall.

First up is always Stephen Vincent Benet’s *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, in which the Godlike Dan’l defends a New Hampshireman who has sold his soul to Scratch. (No, it wasn’t David Souter.) As my daughter and I read it

this year, I thought about Webster, re-elected to Congress in 1814 on the “American Peace Ticket”—a name reeking of treason in our 21st-century America of perpetual war. William Dieterle made a superb film of Benet’s story, but why has no movie ever been made of Webster’s gargantuan life?

We read Poe, of course, and after the House of Usher collapses into the tarn, I eye the fissure in our foundation with a certain foreboding. Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” with its sumptuous description of a Dutch repast, confirms my taste for oly koeks (whatever they are) over Little Debbies. Next up is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s allegory “Young Goodman Brown,” in which a Salem Puritan finds—or does he?—that “There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given.” The Cheney family motto, I’ll bet.

Hawthorne wrote a campaign biography of his old Bowdoin College classmate Franklin Pierce, whom he judged “deep, deep, deep.” Why has no American novelist written about the strange yet fortifying friendship of Hawthorne and Pierce? We’ve such a fantastically rich history, yet men drain away their days watching the living dead wrestle animated corpses on MSNBC and Fox.

I had approached Russell Kirk’s ghost stories with dread, fearing that on the scare-meter they’d register even lower than the supernatural tales (*Turn of the Screw* aside) of Henry James, in which, at most, a spinster’s petticoats are rus-

tled by a draft. Yet Kirk’s ghostly tales, collected in *Ancestral Shadows*, cast a spell. I annually read “Saviourgate,” in which a harried man has a restorative whiskey and chat at a small hotel on the borderland between this world and the next; and “An Encounter by Mortstone Pond,” wherein a used-up man meets and emboldens his younger sorrowful self. There is, in Kirk’s diction and pace, a fustiness which in other writers might seem an affectation, but hey, who am I to complain about stylistic idiosyncrasies?

Here’s another book that ought to be: *Ghost Stories by Reactionaries*. To the finest of Kirk and James add tales (from *Black Spirits and White*) by the architect Ralph Adams Cram, who designed that most Octoberish of campuses, the Hudson River Gothic West Point. And throw in H.P. Lovecraft, upon whose headstone is incised one of my favorite epitaphs: “I AM PROVIDENCE.”

Forget the Old Ones. The horrors of Cthulhu pale before this Lovecraft observation:

A man belongs where he has roots—where the landscape and milieu have some relation to his thoughts and feelings, by virtue of having formed them. A real civilization recognizes this fact—and the circumstance that America is beginning to forget it, does far more than does the mere matter of commonplace thought and bourgeois inhibitions to convince me that the general American fabric is becoming less and less a true civilization and more and more a vast, mechanical, and emotionally immature barbarism de luxe.

Now *that* is terrifying. ■