

ror. For instance, contrary to what Mayer implies, the Liberty Party never argued that the central government could or should prohibit slavery within individual states. And when the prospect of finally ridding the country of human bondage during the Civil War seduced Garrison into compromising and supporting Lincoln and the Republican party, Mayer sympathizes with his subject too much.

But better a biography that is overly sympathetic than yet another harsh denunciation of Garrison the wild-eyed fanatic. Mayer's flaws are so trivial they hardly dim the luster of this inspiring work.

Jeffrey Rogers Hummel is the author of Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War.

THE WIT OF NATIONS

By David R. Henderson

Eat the Rich

By P. J. O'Rourke

Atlantic Monthly Press, 246 Pages, \$24

Since 1776, when Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations*, countless volumes have been written by people who call themselves economists, but in those 200-plus years, no one has tried to write books about economics that are purposely funny. Finally, however, there is such a book. It is *Eat the Rich* (I guess that title beats *Steal This Book*) by P. J. O'Rourke, the humorist and columnist for *Rolling Stone*.

O'Rourke addresses the most important question in economics: "Why do some places prosper and thrive while others just suck?" Adam Smith dealt with that same question. So think of O'Rourke as a modern Adam Smith, with these two differences: O'Rourke's data are more recent, and you'll get side-splitting laughs on every page.

O'Rourke leads off by junking the notion that a brilliant mind is sufficient, or even necessary, to generate wealth. "No part of the earth (with the possible exception of Brentwood) is dumber than Beverly Hills," he says, "and the residents are wading in gravy.

In Russia, meanwhile, where chess is a spectator sport, they're boiling stones for soup." Nor is education the answer. "Fourth graders in the American school system know what a condom is but aren't sure about 9 x 7."

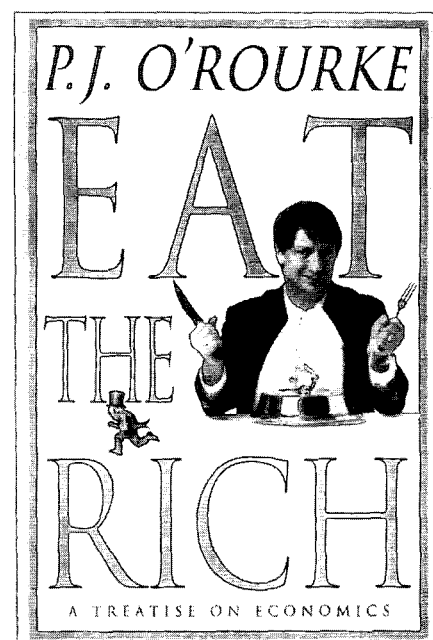
Why not figure out what makes economies rich by reading an economics textbook? O'Rourke lists a number of reasons, one of which is the prose style of the typical economics text: "puerile and impenetrable, *Goodnight Moon* rewritten by Henry James."

Style isn't O'Rourke's only objection to economics textbooks; he says the content is typically questionable, too. O'Rourke quotes famous MIT economist Paul Samuelson: "Marx was wrong about many things...but that does not diminish his stature as an important economist." Asks O'Rourke: "Well, what would? If Marx was wrong about many things and screwed the baby-sitter?"

Always, O'Rourke expresses economic ideas in humorous, understandable ways. Here he is on bond ratings. "A D-rated bond is like money lent to a younger brother. An AAA-rated bond is like money lent to a younger brother by the Gambino family."

To explain what kinds of economic systems work and what ones don't, he takes you on his travels—to Sweden, Cuba, Albania, Tanzania, Hong Kong, Russia, and Shanghai. O'Rourke notes that in Sweden, which practices "Good Socialism," workers get unlimited sick leave with no reduction in pay rate. He writes: "During a brief period of nonsocialist rule in 1991, a one-day waiting period for sick-leave benefits was instituted. An enormous drop in Monday and Friday worker illnesses resulted—one of the medical miracles of the twentieth century."

O'Rourke is less funny when he discusses Cuba ("Bad Socialism")—understandable, given that Cuba keeps a higher proportion of the population as political prisoners than any other country on earth. But even in discussing Cuba, O'Rourke launches some great lines. Pointing out that private restaurants are allowed so long as they employ only family members, O'Rourke writes: "It will be interesting to see how this model works



if it's applied to other free enterprise undertakings, such as airlines. Mom will begin beverage service as soon as Junior gets the landing gear up."

O'Rourke's ruminations on the Russian economy are dead-on funny. How about this for a succinct statement of the problems with Communism:

If a shoe factory was told to produce 1,000 shoes, it produced 1,000 baby shoes, because these were the cheapest and easiest to make. If it was told to produce 1,000 men's shoes, it made them all in one size. If it was told to produce 1,000 shoes in a variety for men, women, and children, it produced 998 baby shoes, one pump, and one wing tip. If it was told to produce 3,000 pounds of shoes, it produced one enormous pair of concrete sneakers.

When the Russian government allowed people to bring back \$2,000 in duty-free imports, Russians reacted. "Clothing, toys, and small appliances were packed into enormous burlap sacks so that the baggage-claim area of any Russian airport with international flights seemed to be populated by hundreds of Santa Clauses in their off-duty clothes." During O'Rourke's four-day trip on the famed Trans-Siberian Railroad across Russia, he sat on the south side of the train, with no fan, no ventilation, no

window shade, and a window that didn't open. So he got relief by sticking his head out of a window in the corridor and letting his jaw hang open in the breeze. "I saw most of Siberia the way your dog sees I-95."

So what does cause economic growth? O'Rourke reaches pretty much the same conclusions Adam Smith reached, namely that clearly enforced property rights, free markets, free trade, and small government create wealth. What keeps people poor, writes O'Rourke, are large governments doing too much, and almost all of it badly.

In a passage unusual for its serious passion, O'Rourke writes, "Poverty is hard, wretched, and humiliating. Poverty is schoolgirl prostitutes trying to feed their parents in Cuba.... But what poverty is not is sad. Poverty is infuriating."

David R. Henderson, an adjunct scholar with the American Enterprise Institute, is a research fellow with the Hoover Institution.

PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE

By Norah Vincent

Elegy For Iris

By John Bayley

St. Martin's Press, 294 pages, \$22.95

The late Iris Murdoch's dementia was one of those diabolical cosmic jokes, on the order of Milton's going blind or Beethoven's growing deaf. You wonder why it couldn't have happened to a writer like Russell Baker or Joyce Carol Oates. Moreover, you wonder why it had to burden Murdoch's delightful, devoted husband John Bayley. For, as this fond memoir about his life and love with Iris so achingly shows, Bayley is the one who felt the loss of her faculties most keenly.

But Bayley's story is not really sad. There are painful moments, as when the deteriorated Iris seems to say something stunningly coherent, even poetic, and then slips back into babbling, but they are far outnumbered by insights and touching remembrances. It is almost as though Bayley is writing a por-

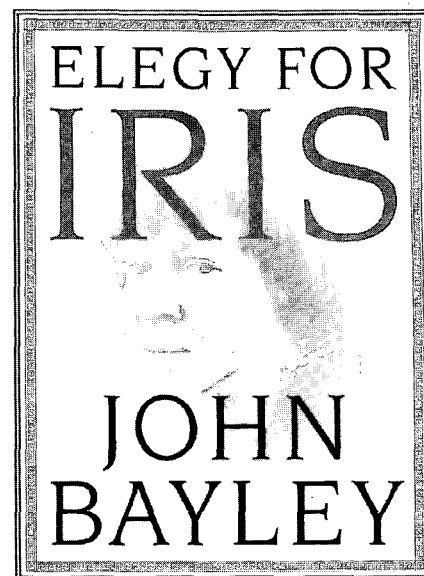
trait of a marriage, and Iris's Alzheimer's is merely the occasion for doing so, the impetus for finally putting pen to paper. Though loss is a painful muse, for Bayley it is an expeditious one that has allowed him to write about much more than his grief at being forced to watch the first-class mind of the woman he loves regress into childhood.

He and Iris shared a deep bond, yet there is never the feeling, present in many tragic love stories, that the two lovers have merged or lost their identities to each other. On the contrary, Bayley describes their union as a process of "moving closer and closer apart." He means this in the best possible way:

So married life began. And the joys of solitude. No contradiction was involved. The one went perfectly with the other. To feel oneself held and cherished and accompanied, and yet to be alone. To be closely and physically entwined, and yet feel solitude's friendly presence, as warm and undesolating as contiguity itself.

Even more than the rarity of their relationship, intellectual modesty is what distinguished both Bayley and Murdoch in the world of letters, and this is what makes Bayley's portrayal of that world so pleasing to read. Most of Bayley's criticisms of literary snobs take the form of gentle ribbing. Now and then Bayley does strike a direct (but not vindictive) hit that exposes some rot in the literary world. These flaws often contrast starkly against Murdoch's writerly equanimity. "Among writers, it is the lofty moralists, the politically and socially correct, that usually turn out in their private lives to be as pushy as Proust's Madame Verdurin," Bayley observes, noting, "Iris had no need for consciousness of herself as an author.... She went on then secretly, quietly doing her work, never wishing to talk about it, never needing to compare or discuss or contrast, never reading reviews or wanting to hear about them...."

How refreshing it is not to see husband and wife quarreling in print, and,



these days, how unusual. If Claire Bloom had come down with Alzheimer's, Philip Roth would have named his new novel *I Married a Moron*. If the Prince of Wales had gone to pulp, Diana would have claimed it was just another form of royal abuse. But there is something truly elite about Bayley, elite in the old-fashioned sense; that is, not elitist in the least. It's something that most Americans, hyperdemocratic poseurs that we are, can only ineptly parody. It's called class.

He does, however, tell some very personal things about Murdoch, who was an almost pathologically private person: that she had several love affairs, for example, and that in her enfeebled state, she could not bathe herself and spent a good portion of her time watching children's shows like the Teletubbies. Bayley touches only lightly on these subjects, however, without providing the kind of belabored detail that would embarrass Murdoch unduly. It seems only fair that Bayley be allowed to write his experience, even if that experience includes a corner of Murdoch's privacy. If anything, Bayley is harder on himself than on his wife. He judges himself harshly for losing his temper when confronted by Murdoch's worst bouts of nonsense. On the whole, any feelings of resentment come across very gently. The pain or disgruntlement