

handsome, young Virginian," and they do the museum together. The young man tells James that his father was a hero of the Confederacy and that he himself would welcome the opportunity to match his father's deeds. James sees that "he wouldn't have hurt a Northern fly" but wonders what, "all fair, engaging, smiling, as he stood there, he would have done to a Southern negro." Again, that sting in the Jamesian honey.

Before leaving Richmond, James remarks on the strangely "desolate space" surrounding the very high equestrian statue of Lee, just as he had earlier criticized the General Sherman in New York's Central Park as too peaceful. He lets neither side take refuge in easy icons.

Florida is the final thing the author casts his eyes upon in this dark book. He pretends to have expected it to be the country of his boyhood romances, a "fantastic Florida, with its rank vegetation and its warm heroic, amorous air . . . the Florida of the Seminoles and the Everglades, of the high old Spanish dons and the passionate Creole beauties." The reality was eating in "buffet cars" on noisy trains and sojourning in jammed hotels. Florida irritated James; true, he had at his disposal "the velvet air" and the sea and "the admirable pale-skinned orange" and "the huge sun-warmed grape-fruit, plucked from the low bough, where it fairly bumps your cheek for solicitation"; even the hotel was "vast and cool and fair, friendly, breezy, shiny, swabbed and burnished like a royal yacht, really immaculate and delightful." It was the people that bothered him—bothered him finally for being not individual enough, for being merely types, and types, be it said, such as pushy women and bratty children that James had limited tolerance for. James's imagination was ever on the hunt for curious human stories; his complaint against the tourists' Florida was that the human soil was too thin for a writer. On the train going back north, in the book's last, crazy pages, James has a fierce argument with his Pullman car. The clacketing train boasts of its transformation of the virgin landscape: "See what I'm making of all this—see what I'm making, what I'm making." James, ecologically minded *avant la lettre*, roars back:

If I were one of the painted savages you have dispossessed . . . what you are making would doubtless impress me

more than what you are leaving unmade, for in that case it wouldn't be to *you* that I should be looking in any degree for beauty or for charm. Beauty and charm would be for me in the solitude you have ravaged, and I should owe you my grudge for every disfigurement and every violence, for every wound with which you have caused the face of the land to bleed.

In this Platonic dialogue among the Railroad, the Painted Savage (a.k.a. "a beautiful red man with a tomahawk"), and the Civilized Traveler, James is nobly worrying about mere material advance without respect for the beauty that preceded it or the culture that alone can elevate it.

James's was not the only soul to be darkened by contemplation of late-

Gilded Age America; think of late Twain or Henry Adams or, for that matter, Dreiser. But he is a major witness; again and again in this odd book his mandarin spirit turns savagely to ask of America hard, tough, angry, real questions. If he saw Europe in affectionately soft focus, over here, at home, he looked with the unsparing eye of family. He compared Florida to a Cleo-less Egypt before Pharaohs and Pyramids; just so, he likened California to a "sort of prepared but unconscious and inexperienced Italy, the primitive plate, in perfect condition, but with the impression of History all yet to be made." These few words are virtually the only thing he wrote about California, and yet he got it in the womb. What would he have made of the faux Italy that did, as he foresaw, arise? □

THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE MASSES: PRIDE & PREJUDICE AMONG THE LITERARY INTELLIGENTSIA, 1880-1939

John Carey

St. Martin's Press / 246 pages / \$19.95

reviewed by CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

According to John Carey, a good number of modern English writers were mere self-important snobs who felt a literally violent disdain towards mass humanity. Angry that newspapers, radio, and cinema were reducing the artist's priestly importance, and despairing of keeping art as their private domain, modern writers resorted to illogic and ugliness to render their work incomprehensible to the mob. Thus, Carey writes, "though it usually purports to be progressive, the avant-garde is . . . always reactionary."

And worse. Carey, Merton Professor of English at Oxford, formulates his theoretical framework over the first half of the book: The masses were objectified and undifferentiated, he says; they were "rewritten" as exotics and as peasantry by

elites who found their striving unseemly. By the extremist and the bloody-minded they were compared to vermin and bacteria. One line of thought saw them as *dead*. Carey then uses the book's second half to test his theories out against one mass-loving writer (Arnold Bennett) and three who, to one extent or another, rued the masses' rise (George Gissing, H.G. Wells, and Wyndham Lewis). Along the way, he trawls the work of nearly every major English novelist and poet of the years 1880-1939 and issues his indictment: England's modernists helped shape the worldview that would culminate in Auschwitz.

This mass-loathing was not a matter of left- or right-wing ideology (which Carey, apparently some kind of progressive, ignores anyway) but of class, and even of taste. It was the suburban London clerks, with their red-brick-

Christopher Caldwell is assistant managing editor of *The American Spectator*.

university educations and their subscriptions to *Tit-Bits* and their hunger for self-improvement, who alarmed the intelligentsia as interlopers and rivals. Carey describes a suburb-baiting novel by one T.W.H. Crosland, who blames the new class of clerks not only for overcrowding and tawdriness but also for vanguard social doctrines like vegetarianism, socialism, and feminism. Then he records the consternation of Fabian socialists Edith Nesbit and Hubert Bland, who want to help the working classes but would prefer to have the ugly houses they live in torn down. The lumpen masses, too, are occasion for hypocrisy: Graham Greene, on a trip to proletarian Nottingham in 1926, wrote his fiancée that the city was a “ghastly” place that “destroys democratic feelings at birth.” (“One sees absolutely no one here of one’s own class.”) He then wrote a stirring poem about the urban unemployed that might vouch for his left-wing credentials.

Any attempt to take the poseurs of modernism down a peg can only be welcomed, and we hardly need to be told that some of these literary intellectuals were pretty terrible people. The novelist Jean Rhys, for example, who left her newborn son near a window, giving him pneumonia, and spent the evening of his death drinking champagne with her husband; or Wyndham Lewis, who was in bed with the nymphomaniac heiress Nancy Cunard when another mistress returned from the hospital with their own newborn—Lewis had them wait outside in the cold. Like Paul Johnson’s *Intellectuals*, the book is pleasing enough as voyeurism, even if it does take an irresponsible delight in re-futing theory with biography.

Unfortunately, Carey is apt to overstate the degree to which characters speak for the authors who’ve created them, protecting himself behind a weak disclaimer. Here is a good example of his method:

The evidence suggests that [H.G.] Wells thought of women as by nature extravagant, and addicted to clothes, chatter and shopping. There is not a single woman, complains the consumptive Masterman in [Wells’s novel] *Kipps*, “who wouldn’t lick the boots of a Jew or marry a nigger, rather than live decently on a hundred a year.” These were

not precisely Wells’s sentiments, but he seems to have shared Masterman’s exasperation.

To show that the modernists thought of the masses as “dead,” Carey uses sentiments voiced by characters in the modernists’ poems and novels, including one of the “voices” in *The Waste Land*, and the protagonist in Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, whom the novel is explicitly devoted to repudiating. He takes the discovery—somewhere in the millions of words D.H. Lawrence put into print—of the sentiment “Three cheers for the inventors of poison gas,” along with a statement by a character in the obscure novel *Kangaroo*, to show that Lawrence was



moving towards acceptance of the kind of politics that would culminate in the building of death camps in Poland and Germany. “If most people are dead already,” says Carey, “then their elimination becomes easier to contemplate, since it will not involve any real fatality.”

You can see where he’s headed, but it is not until the concluding chapter, “Wyndham Lewis and Hitler,” that Carey goes off the deep end, all but blaming England’s literary set for the Final Solution. Granted, Lewis is an easy mark, having written an appreciation of Hitler in 1931 and two more pro-totalitarian books in the thirties. According to Carey:

Totalitarian regimes [Lewis believes] are to be admired for perceiving that human beings are naturally subservient. . . . On this, as on other subjects, Lewis’s vehe-

mence issues in self-contradiction. He deplores the collectivism of the industrial world, “herding people into enormous mechanized masses,” . . . yet he urges that this stultifying process should be stepped up, because as the mass becomes more and more comatose, the few “free intelligences will be isolated and thrown into prominence . . .”

But let’s keep this in perspective. Lewis, while clearly evil, was a silly little man. His preference for totalitarianism was based on a number of risible prejudices, including the hope that state monopolies would eliminate the need for advertising. And Lewis’s espousal of fascism, Carey fails to note, was the occasion of his irreversible fall from grace among intellectuals. No one would argue that many literary figures haven’t been shameful in their accommodation of totalitarianism. But Carey, who berates intellectuals for never seeing the “masses” as a collection of individual souls, seems unable to distinguish Adolf Hitler from a pompous London aesthete complaining about mouthwash billboards.

Carey doesn’t stop there. He juxtaposes Hitler’s words and deeds with those of a host of twentieth-century writers taken seemingly at random. The geriatric BBC functionary Rayner Heppenstall confided to his journal that he would “happily commit total genocide” against the Irish and the Arabs. (Carey: “Hitler would have readily understood.”) The fact that no one has ever heard of Rayner Heppenstall doesn’t dim Carey’s ardor any.

Those modernists even had the logistics of the Holocaust covered: “As for disposal of the bodies, cremation was, as we have seen, firmly linked by intellectuals with the soulless masses some years before Hitler adopted it for his final solution.” This is a reference to the movement to legalize cremation in the 1890s—which, Carey may need reminding, was for people who were *already dead*.

What we’re left with is a retrospective exercise in political correctness, a Catharine MacKinnonism that holds a blowhard or a phony as morally culpable as a mass murderer: →

Another respect in which Hitler's fantasies about the mass conformed to a common intellectual pattern was in his division of the mass into the bourgeoisie, which, like all intellectuals, he despised, and the workers . . . In the early days of the movement he made sure members came to meetings without collars or ties, believing that this "free and easy style" would win workers' confidence. . . . English leftist intellectuals of the Auden group in the 1930s likewise set about proletarianizing themselves. Auden wore a cloth cap, dropped his aitches and ate peas with a knife . . .

Call it the "like Hitler a lover of dogs . . ." method of guilt-by-association. Note that Carey finds no fault with Auden for the totalitarianism he *did* actively support: the Stalinism of the Great Terror. But Carey is less interested in the intellectual roots of totalitarianism than in making use of a witty interpretation of Hitler's legacy for a kind of cheap moral stunt. (As such, his book resembles other recent efforts of the British intelligentsia, like David Irving's cheeky claim that Hitler can't be definitively proved to have known about the Final Solution; or Andrew Motion's idle imputation of Nazi sympathies to Philip Larkin on the basis of a childhood trip to Kreuznach and an adult affection for Margaret Thatcher.)

Carey uses the final pages of the book to set up his cheapest shot. He first notes that Hitler admired Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe, and classical Greece, deplored modern art, worshipped the artist as hero, etc. Then he begins the next paragraph:

It is hard to see what could be accounted trivial, half-baked or disgusting about these propositions from the standpoint of early twentieth-century intellectuals, or, for that matter, from the standpoint of a late twentieth-century intellectual such as George Steiner.

Or, he might have added, from the standpoint of Anne Frank or Raoul Wallenberg.

"It is true," Carey adds as an aside, "that Hitler goes on to suggest that the feat of producing the great achievements of Western art effectively establishes the supremacy of the Aryan race . . ." Oh yes, but except for that, and the bit about the ovens, he and Steiner see eye-to-eye! □

SICK SOCIETIES: CHALLENGING THE MYTH OF PRIMITIVE HARMONY

Robert Edgerton

The Free Press / 269 pages / \$24.95

THE DECOMPOSITION OF SOCIOLOGY

Irving Louis Horowitz

Oxford University Press / 243 pages / \$25

reviewed by FRED SIEGEL

Recently a friend, a businesswoman with a passing interest in social policy, asked me, "Whatever happened to anthropology?" Thinking that she was referring to the increasingly self-conscious and therapeutic character of cultural anthropology, I told her the joke about the New Age anthropologist doing field work. After an almost four-hour conversation with the chief of a remote tribe, the interviewer stopped to say, "Okay, enough about me—let's talk about you." But it turned out that she simply meant that with all the discussion of how American popular culture in general and ghetto culture in particular had turned rancid, those specialists on culture, the anthropologists, had nothing to say.

Robert Edgerton's *Sick Societies* addresses American culture only for a few pages, to discuss the pathologies of the West Virginia hollows. But his account of the Rousseauist assumptions enshrined in American anthropology provided part of the answer to my friend's question. Chief among these assumptions, as Edgerton explains, is that "because smaller and simpler societies . . . develop their cultures in response to the demands of their immediate and stable environments, their ways of life must have produced far greater harmony and happiness." It is the belief "that emotional and moral commitment, per-

sonal intimacy, social cohesion . . . were lost in the transition to urban life" that Edgerton challenges.

Most of *Sick Societies* is given over to summarizing cases of dysfunctional, primitive practices and societies maladapted to their environment. Take Tasmania, which, because of its geography, was totally isolated and free from external pressure or competition. Unable to make fire the Tasmanians gave up on fishing, and lived

generation after generation, abandoning previously useful practices without creating new ones. Given their relatively abundant food supply the various tribes might have been able to live relatively amicably. But instead in pursuit of women they lived in a Hobbesian world of raid and counter. Four thousand years of isolated primitivism led not to harmonious adaptation but . . . to a "slow strangulation of the mind."

American anthropology has its origins in Franz Boas's crusade against white supremacy and the racism of the eugenics movement, which argued that Darwinism explained the moral and mental attributes as well as the physical characteristics of different groups. But that attack on xenophobic intolerance, the benefits of which we are still reaping today, turned on itself. Boas, crusader for tolerance that he was, argued nonetheless that the sympathetic study of

Fred Siegel is professor of history at the Cooper Union and a columnist for the New York Post.