

are topped by the nameless drudge at Simon & Schuster who describes *Soviet Power* as "brilliant" on the dustcover. Steele will be brilliant when, as Khrushchev used to say, shrimps learn to whistle.

The Soviet Union Today, by contrast, contains a valuable collection of articles on various aspects of the Soviet Union, from geography to culture, by 26 experts in their respective fields. Although the authors do not always agree with each other, the net effect of the book is to provide a superb foundation for further study of the U.S.S.R.

It is worth noting that one of the reasons for the book's value is its relatively heavy reliance on émigré authors. Normally, émigrés are ignored by Western Sovietologists as a result of professional jealousy (the émigrés possess firsthand experience which Western "experts" simply do not have), political pique (the émigrés are virtually unanimous in opposing the fashionable myth of Soviet "moderation," and are therefore summarily dismissed as "biased" or "embittered"), and fear (American institutions featuring émigrés too prominently may find themselves de-

prived by the Soviets of the opportunity to engage in "cultural exchanges" and other academic boondoggles). The result is a squandering of priceless intellectual resources that is little short of criminal; if the Western democracies had taken the same attitude toward refugees from Hitler, their scientific progress would have lagged fatally behind that of their enemies. To the credit of its publisher and its editor, *The Soviet Union Today* avoids this pitfall which results in a compendium of useful information.

American scientists, for instance, find Soviet technical journals hard to read ("It is clear . . . that an interesting result has been obtained—but not how or why; all the intermediate equations have been left out"). What is the explanation? Although "analysts" like Steele would no doubt babble repeatedly about compulsions for secrecy embedded in the Slavic soul, the true explanation is set forth in *The Soviet Union Today* by an émigré scientist:

This happens owing to an acute shortage of paper in the Soviet Union, and leading scientific publications

impose strict limits on the length of their articles. *The Journal of Experimental and Theoretical Physics*, for example, requires that submitted papers be no longer than 15 typed pages. It specifies that the account of the experiment must be very concise and that descriptions of intermediate calculations or other details may be omitted. Hence the difficulty in reading such articles.

The true explanation, incidentally, is far more significant for understanding the Soviet system than mystical appeals to Russian psychology. The U.S.S.R. has more extensive forests than any other country in the world; it is the socialist system that denies adequate paper to its leading scientific journals. In the words of an old Soviet joke:

What would happen if the U.S.S.R. seized the Sahara desert?

For ten years, nothing; then there would be a shortage of sand.

The two books, in short, exemplify the best and the worst in Western popular analysis of the Soviet Union. □

Making a Morass of Metaphysics

Fred Kaplan: *Thomas Carlyle*; Cornell University Press; Ithaca.

by Bryce J. Christensen

Most people know nothing about metaphysics and wish to know less. The case is not that they do not actually govern their lives in harmony with a set of metaphysical principles, for that is simply not an option. As Aldous Huxley perceived: "It is impossible to live without a metaphysic. The choice that is given is not between some kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic: it is always between good metaphysic and a bad

metaphysic." A moment's reflection confirms the validity of Huxley's perception. Because meaning is always binary, consisting of corporeal fact and interpretative pattern, purposeful life always presupposes both the physical world of sensation and some metaworld of ideals.

However, though everyone has a philosophy, few think about it rigorously or philosophically. For centuries this has meant that millions of Westerners have accepted some form of Judeo-Christianity without subjecting it to much intellectual scrutiny. Doubtless many of these believers could justly be charged with mental laziness. But even the deepest of Jewish and Christian thinkers have concluded that the metaphysical premises of biblical faith are ultimately

beyond the reach of the subtlest thought. Yahweh fashions an earth, then speaks to its inhabitants out of a burning bush, a whirlwind, or in a still small voice; the eternal Logos becomes flesh in Bethlehem—these are simply sacred *givens*, manifestations of salvific grace, not the demonstrable discoveries of any rational analysis. Such a metaphysics requires the most adept scholars, just as much as the most unlettered fishermen, to adopt an epistemological humility, an openness to the revelation the Lord promised when He said to the Psalmist: "Be still and know that I am God."

But the thinkers of the modern world have generally not been still, nor have they known God. Rationalists and skeptics of various schools have repudiated

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the *givens* of revelation and thus undermined Judeo-Christian logocentrism. As Huxley well understood, however, the destruction of one system of metaphysics does not leave a vacuum, for it always requires the acceptance of some other and quite possibly worse system. Nowhere is this more evident than in the life of Thomas Carlyle, a man appropriately labelled by one of his critics as a pivotal exponent of "the idea of the modern."

As a young man, Carlyle deeply sensed the need for some "system of metaphysics, not for talk, but for adoption and belief." But after a study of Gibbon, D'Alembert, Hume, and Diderot convinced him that he could no longer accept the Presbyterian faith he learned as a child and after a survey of philosophy left him still unsatisfied, he rejected all extant metaphysics as an "inexpressibly unproductive" realm of "Air-Castles . . . cunningly built of Words." The time had come, he announced, for creative writers to engage in a project of "Constructive Metaphysics" embodied in "a new Bible" of Literature. Accordingly, he identified "the Guild of Authors" as "the true Church" and prophesied that "peace will never be till they are recognized as such." During a lifetime in which he was widely hailed as a "prophet" and his works read as "scripture" by idealistic young people, Carlyle did receive some of the recognition as a quasi-priest that he sought. Indeed, Thomas Henry Huxley, grandfather of Aldous, wrote that from Carlyle he had learned that "a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology."

But what is religion without theology? Moreover, in what kind of "Church" can such a religion be practiced? Obviously, when *Theos*, i.e. God, no longer provides the metaphysical basis for religious meaning, a new focus of worship must be found. Carlyle's "Constructive Metaphysics" offered a "new (or totally unconceived) species of divineness" that did "not come from Judea, from Olympus, Asgard, Mount Mecca, but is in

man himself." At first such a notion of internal human "divineness" may seem a comfortable one, easy to live with: no fear of displeasing a divine Judge; no tearful repentance for sin; no agonizing search for objectively true religious doctrine. But such a "divineness" turns out to be, as the course of Carlyle's own life and works demonstrates, more merciless and exacting than any creed given by the sternest external Lawgiver. For if there is no One outside of man to condemn him for his sins, neither is there

himself against the Apostle Paul's teaching that salvation is "not of works lest we should boast" and expressed his hope "to go through so handsomely, without aid from any grinder or *boner* whatever, but purely by one's own resources." As Fred Kaplan shows in his meticulously researched biography, undoubtedly the standard for years to come, Carlyle did not "go through so handsomely"; his was a life of frantic anxiety, strife, bitterness, alienation, and despair. Unfortunately, in his repudiation of grace and his desire to



any One to help him with his problems, not the least of which are finding some meaning for life and establishing some order for society.

Like most other writers of his time and since, Carlyle considered himself above all "religious controversies about faith, works, grace, [and] prevenient grace," but the internal logic of his Constructive Metaphysics forced him to preach one long uninterrupted sermon affirming the "divine" necessity of unrelenting human works to fill the metaphysical vacuum created by the rejection of divine grace. In an early letter to his brother he set

live "purely by one's resources," he spoke for an emerging secular culture which is now likewise floundering in its efforts to survive on its own human resources.

In this sense, Carlyle's biography might be considered not as a new Bible but as a new *Pilgrim's Progress* in which a secularized pilgrim determinedly seeks not salvation in the Celestial City but rather a rewarding career as an influential creative writer in Vanity Fair. And whereas the tenets of Bunyan's faith permitted those who journeyed along the path previously "cast up by the

patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles" to enjoy God's grace in the company of angels and of other believers, Carlyle's defiant gospel of Work doomed him to an unwanted solitude as he made his own uncharted path.

Emerson, Thoreau, and other American Transcendentalists fervently admired Carlyle, but unlike him they cheerfully accepted the fragmentation of society as a consequence of iconoclastic self-reliance. Literature might be the new Scripture, but in Thoreau's vision every man was to use such sacred texts within a private temple erected to "the god he worships after a style purely his own." Carlyle, however, wanted a new Church not of scattered sheep but of one united social fold. In the past, cohesive churches had been built by missionaries who could, either through reason or through spiritual manifestations, persuade converts that their doctrines and authority were of superhuman origin. Affording neither pentacostal wonders nor logical syllogisms, Carlyle's anthropocentric faith in literature forced him either to accept his American admirers' privatized understanding of religion or to look for some other mode of proselytizing.

In his early essays, Carlyle argued that creative writers who put their soul on display in "unconsciously autobiographic" works showed the world the true nature of the divine and therefore deserved reverential disciples. Accordingly, in his first major work, *Sartor Resartus*, he put his own contorted psyche on display in the guise of the eccentric German writer Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, whose Pen was a miraculous substitute for Aaron's Rod. The miracle Carlyle most hoped to effect through this brash act of self-disclosure was that of winning a society of converts. Most early Victorians, however, proved even less tractable to the egotistic bearer of this new ecclesiastical rod than Korah was to Moses. Carlyle therefore imitated his prophetic prototype by dropping his rebellious contemporaries into an abyss

—the abyss of *The French Revolution*. In order to put his disobedient readers into this historical pit, though, Carlyle, unlike Moses, had to leap in first, leaving behind the ahistorical literature of self-exposure.

As he hoped, Carlyle did win a wide audience with his impassioned and vivid portrayal of the Revolution as an elemental and inevitable conflagration, consuming the rotten "Shams and Insupportabilities" of traditional religion. He devoutly hoped that the priesthood of Authors would be the ones to summon the Phoenix of a new communal faith forth from the ashes. Yet it was Napoleon, not any self-exhibiting creative writer, who finally emerged as the deity of the emergent new French society, while as hard as Carlyle tried to convert his own fame as an author into immediate religious and social authority in Britain, he met with only frustration and disappointment. Consequently, after struggling unsuccessfully in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* with the question of how to set up a social arrangement that gave authors contemporaneous socioreligious power, he finally bowed his knee to Cromwell, Napoleon, and Frederick the Great, a new trinity of gods who imposed their religious views by force.

That the verge in Carlyle's new Church was ultimately neither Aaron's Rod nor Teufelsdröckh's Pen but Frederick's Sword was inevitable given the original terms of Carlyle's Constructive Metaphysics. So long as the Mount of Olives and Sinai tower above the contingent human self, religious authority and social order may be predicated on something other than armed might. Once the mustard seed of Carlyle's new faith had cast these mountains out of his metaworld and into the sea of subjective human divineness, mankind was left stranded on Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain." Carlyle tried to lift himself and his society above this plain of combative disorder to some more elevated order by tugging ferociously at his literary bootstraps, but all he ended up with after all his tugging was a totalitarian jackboot.

A career that began with a nontheological affirmation of the human "Spirit" of religion and a strenuous attack upon militarism and duplicity concluded with shrill acclaim for an agnostic Prussian who imposed his private version of "all the Law and all the Prophets" upon Catholic Silesia through deceit and bloody aggression. Inevitably, Carlyle's new credo, rooted in nothing but his own ego, collapsed into near-Nietzschean nihilism, with the righteousness of might an inescapable article of faith.

Hence, to call Carlyle's movement from the wildly idiosyncratic satire of *Sartor* to the harsh authoritarianism of *Frederick* a shift of "growing conservatism," as critics commonly do, is profoundly misleading. Though the conservative mind recognizes the need for authority in a humanely ordered society, it must also recognize the need for a credible philosophical justification for the decisions enforced by that authority. No judge, policeman, or military officer can conserve anything worthwhile in a world which lacks a stable, communally shared vision of another and better metaworld. But from its Alpha to its Omega Carlyle's "new Bible" constituted an effort to abrogate, not to conserve, the metaphysical principles in the old Bible upon which Western civilization is predicated. Far from "conservative," Carlyle's "Constructive Metaphysics" was yet another of the perilously innovative modern philosophies which have boarded up what Malachi called "the windows of heaven," even as they have unlocked the doors to government power to the darkest sons of earth. In the last moments of a life devoted to promulgating his own monstrous "religion without theology," Adolf Hitler was moved to tears of devotion as Goebbels read to him from Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, a very popular work of scripture in nazi Germany. □

Unclassical Tragedy

Bob Woodward: *Wired: The Short Times & Fast Life of John Belushi*; Simon and Schuster; New York.

by Todd G. Buccholz

Bob Woodward is an aggressive journalist who has helped reveal the secrets of Supreme Court Justices and a president. Like his previous efforts, *Wired* is a best-seller full of gossip and intrigue. Excerpts have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *New York Post*, and *Playboy*.

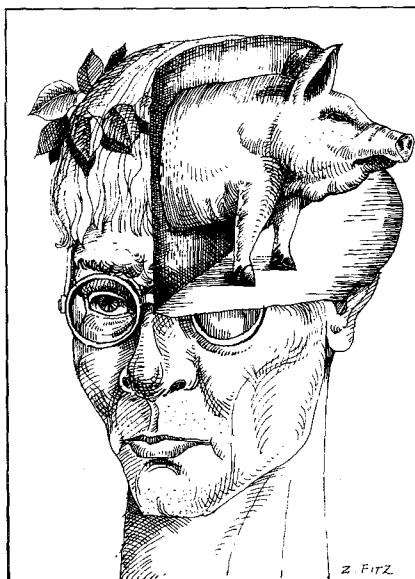
John Belushi found fame in 1975 as a member of "The Not Ready for Prime Time Players," the comedy troupe that appears on NBC-TV's *Saturday Night Live*. He became more famous to the public through a series of (with the exception of *Animal House*) forgettable films. He became more famous to Hollywood through a social life that was driven by drugs and ended by drugs in 1982.

While Belushi's life was not quite as short and fast as the title intimates, Woodward focuses on just a few essential aspects. *Wired* is not a biography that tries to trace emotional and psychological trends from childhood to the climax of a career. But where Woodward chooses to focus he examines with diligence. *Wired* contains so many facts about what Belushi did and where he did it, that if Belushi had lived he could not have delivered a more detailed account.

After a brief profile of Belushi's high school years in Wheaton, Illinois, where he was cocaptain of the football team and the school's best actor, *Wired* depicts his climb to national stardom. The mercurial actor distinguished himself in improvisation shows in Chicago, earning rave reviews from city newspapers. This was the early 1970's. His wild appearance with long, frizzy hair and

slightly bulging belly fit both the times and his temperament. In narrating this period, Woodward points to the start of Belushi's drug use, also apropos for the early 1970's. This, and not Belushi's talent, emerges as the dominant motif.

Woodward, while maintaining the drug theme, does describe the years at *Saturday Night Live* and the making of several movies. Some intriguing points are raised. When Columbia Pictures was convinced that the movie *Neighbors* would be a disaster, producers adopted a hit and run strategy—releasing the film just a few days before Christmas, hoping to hit the big market and then let the poor picture die. Their strategy proved prudent, for the film was a loser.



Self-indulgence causes trouble in Hollywood. Movie budgets are often said to be inflated to cover drug purchases, and when a star cannot control his appetites, he can subject an organization to strange pressures. Woodward recounts one incident, when Belushi arrived at director Louis Malle's office demanding to see a script:

John kept thrashing about... sweating as if there were a flame under him.

Word was being spread... that John was there, and people from some other offices popped by to see him or hang around outside... It was like Mardi Gras and all of a sudden a John Belushi float had entered the room.

Woodward is so confident of his research that he does not hesitate to tell the reader who in Hollywood takes or sells drugs. Jack Nicholson and Robert De Niro are on his list of takers—which might explain some recent flops.

Obviously, the real story is not just John Belushi but drugs, psychological instability, and Hollywood. Woodward only gets part of the story. Although Woodward is renowned for getting behind the scenes, he does not know what to do once he gets there. *Wired* has the facts but offers no more insights than a travelogue. And Woodward's style is no more elegant or interesting than Belushi's wife's, if her diaries are any guide.

What was Belushi like, when he was not a Mardi Gras float? Why did he become a Mardi Gras float? At times Woodward tells us that Belushi could be endearing, but this seems unlikely. Woodward gives the impression that there might have been more to Belushi. The only hints are that Belushi would cry every few years when a friend would tell him to cut down on cocaine. Once he stopped crying, however, the habit would resume. According to his wife, he was the same about his weight:

John looked stuffed, his stomach like a giant, taut beach ball. Finally, she decided to broach the subject—wouldn't it be tough when he had to sing and dance hard for the filming? He agreed it would be and said he wanted to do something to lose weight. But that night they went for a big dinner.

More surprising, we do not even discover whether Belushi was a genuinely witty, clever, or funny person. Woodward must have spoken to hundreds of people who knew him. But no