

should be advised that the Poppers define the Great Plains as a region whose "eastern border is the 98th meridian," which runs straight up through the hearts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas and the eastern thirds of Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Denver, Colorado, on the 105th meridian, roughly marks the region's western edge, which means that that state, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico are included too, for a total of 10 states in all. "Although the Plains occupy one fifth of the nation's land area, the region's overall population, approximately 5.5 million, is less than that of Georgia or Indiana," write the Poppers meaningfully.

Although they never really come right out and say so, it's obvious that by "overall" population the Poppers mean the Oshkosh, b'gosh kind: farmers and ranchers. They claim that the soil and the ecology in the Plains states are just too fragile to support the demands made on them nowadays by farming, ranching, and oil, coal, and mineral extraction. They talk about "sodbusters" (whom I'd grown up admiring as settlers who *tamed* the stubborn sod) as greedy or ignorant men who *overgrazed* and *overplowed* the soil, ruining it and leaving a legacy and habits of ruin for those who came later. ("Grass no good upside down," they solemnly quote a 19th-century Pawnee chief saying as he watched homesteaders slice up virgin soil.)

It's not that the Poppers have any of their facts wrong; it's just that their conclusions don't seem to spring naturally from the facts. They're correct in saying that the Great Depression hit the Plains states years before the Wall Street event. They're also right in pointing out that small towns and farmers in the Great Plains went berserk during the energy boom and the fat agricultural years of the 1970's, overbuilding and overplanting, and that now those same towns and farmers are suffering for their shortsightedness. The gargantuan Ogallala Aquifer, providing water for agriculture in six of the Plains states, is drying up from overuse. Soil erosion is a serious problem in many places. Farm foreclosure and bankruptcy are higher in the Plains states than anywhere else. Near-future droughts are predicted, and the "greenhouse effect" is expected to

raise the temperatures everywhere by at least two or three degrees, which would make the Plains even more susceptible to drought.

But it's never been a secret that it's a lot harder to wrench a living from the land in Nebraska or the Dakotas than it is in Iowa or Missouri, where the rain chooses to dump itself and the topsoil seems a hundred miles thick. On the other hand, we're not living in poverty here. Our best grain-growers and livestock ranchers have learned how to wrest a pretty good living from this thin-skinned place without doing any damage. And because of them, our "bigger" cities (over, say, 30,000) are holding their own, population-wise, and every month sees new businesses taking the place of those that have folded. Our small towns are dying gracefully, inevitably. The Great Plains is *not* the Fertile Crescent, and small towns here simply aren't destined to last for more than 100, maybe 150, years.

Yet what the Poppers see as the dismal future here is based mainly on the predictable death of our small towns. And that's where I take heart, because I think the Poppers think our small towns are dead *already*, or might as well be. Their article was accompanied by some rather transparently patronizing photographs captioned, for example, "Picking up the mail at six below in Morton County, North Dakota"; "Saturday night at the Alamo Bar in North Platte, Nebraska"; "Burton and Kurtlye Brewster at lunch with the local postman at the Quarter Circle U Brewster Ranch near Birney, Montana"; and Darrel Coble of Cimarron County, Oklahoma, saying, "I don't really know why I like living here. I guess just 'cause this country's home." Makes me feel like I should ask for food stamps just for having to live in this hellhole.

The Poppers are not the first to come up with this idea, they remind us, citing several forerunners and promising that there will be plenty more. Bret Wallach, a University of Oklahoma geographer and MacArthur fellow, wants the Forest Service to pay willing Plains farmers and ranchers the *full value of what they think they might cultivate in the next 15 years*. The deal is, they *wouldn't* cultivate it—this takes set-asides into the 21st cen-

tury! —but would follow an approved native shortgrass-planting program, after which the Forest Service would buy them out except for a 40-acre homestead. That sounds just tempting enough to be dangerous, except that farmers are farmers because they like the personal freedom to do what they want. Robert Scott of the Institute of the Rockies in Missoula, Montana, wants to turn a tenth of his state into a game preserve he would call the "Big Open." State and federal agencies, combining forces, would remove fences and domestic animals and replace them with game. According to the Poppers, Scott figures that a ranch of 10,000 acres — about four miles on a side, not at all unusual these days — could bring in \$48,000 a year for the sale of hunting licenses, and the one-tenth slice of Montana would add a thousand new jobs to the area: there would apparently be a high demand for "outfitters, taxidermists, workers in gas stations, restaurants, motels." *Whoo-ee, Elmer, let's dump great-grandpaw's homestead and the rest of the 28 sections and get us a job in a GAS STATION. You bet.*

*Jane Greer's great-grandfather Klopfenstein busted sod in Iowa, and she and her husband drain the aquifer onto their shortgrass lawn in doomed Bismarck, North Dakota.*

## Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

Causley at 70

My formal association with *Chronicles* began in February 1986, when, at the suggestion of its editor, I wrote an obituary of Philip Larkin. Looking back at the history of my loves, I explained that I had decided to buy and edit *The Yale Literary Magazine* because "my ambition in life was to find the poet born to translate Rilke into English and publish him." At that time, my ambition remained unfulfilled, although its pursuit did lead me to the living wellsprings of English poetry, with Larkin, whom I had discovered in a secondhand bookshop near Amir's Falafel on Broadway, as my forked stick: "The trees are coming

into leaf" (the book opened at random) "Like something almost being said."

A few issues back, incidentally, *Chronicles* fulfilled that ancient ambition of mine by publishing Rilke's "Autumn Day" translated by Alban Coventry. Apart from one or two forgotten translations by Ludwig Lewisohn in the 1940's, this is the only Rilke poem that will live happily ever after in the English language. From Lewisohn's "Angels" (as I remember it), for comparison:

But let the wings be spread.  
The ages'  
Awakened wind comes  
blowing in:  
As though God with his  
umbrageous  
Broad sculptor's hands has  
turned the pages  
Of the dark book of Origin.

But the fulfillment of an old ambition passes unnoticed, as in a dream. Alban Coventry has given me an English "Autumn Day"; *Chronicles* has become in many ways what *The Yale Literary Magazine* was prevented from being; Philip Larkin is famous. What next?

Next is Charles Causley. Between 1979 and 1982, *The Yale Literary Magazine* published eight important new poems by Causley ("New Year's Eve, Athens"; "Sleeper in a Valley"; "Seven Houses"; "Singing Game"; "Returning South"; "Beechworth"; "In a Melbourne Suburb"; "On Launceston Castle"), when the only collection available to American readers was David Godine's *Charles Causley: Collected Poems 1951-1975* (Boston, 1975). Like Larkin, Causley was a revelation to me in 1975, and it was no coincidence that in the first issue of *The Yale Literary Magazine* (well, the first of Volume 148, actually) his poems followed Larkin's. In 1984, everything we had published was included in the British collection *Secret Destinations (New Poems)*, brought out by Macmillan. Finally, later this month, Godine is bringing out Causley's poems from the last decade under the title of that interim collection: *Secret Destinations (Poems 1977-1987)*. It is wonderful, in this issue's poetry section, to be able to give our readers a preview of this long-

overdue volume.

I saw the poet in February, at the opening of "Causley at 70," an exhibition of paintings, sculpture, manuscripts, and books put on at the University of London to define the spiritual universe of this man. On a past birthday, Larkin addressed his Cornish friend in "A Birthday Card":

Dear Charles, My Muse, asleep  
or dead,  
Offers this doggerel instead . . .  
Ah, Charles, be reassured!  
For you  
Make lasting friends with all  
you do,  
And all you write; your truth  
and sense  
We count on as a sure defence  
Against the trendy and the mad,  
The feeble and the downright  
bad.  
I hope you have a splendid day,  
Acclaimed by wheeling gulls  
at play  
And barking seals, sea-lithe  
and lazy  
(My view of Cornwall's  
rather hazy)  
And humans who don't think  
it sinful  
To mark your birthday with  
. a skinful.

It was in this spirit that the birthday exhibition opened, although throughout the evening the poet was drinking water.

Larkin and Causley: no two poets could be less alike. And yet in one respect they are similar: both are quiet publicly. This is impossible in America, where withdrawal into private life is synonymous with oblivion, but England still offers her poets nooks to crawl into and think in, sometimes among the "barking seals, sea-lithe and lazy"—who am I to improve on Larkin's vision of Cornwall?—though often far less picturesque. This is one reason why your poetry editor writes from misty Albion, and why so many of the poets to appear in these pages are British.

American influence—in the form of the worst that New York has to offer—is increasingly felt, however. The nooks are disappearing one by one, bulldozed by U.S. publishing conglomerates, asphalted under Madison Avenue banalities, and walked on by visiting Columbia professors. This, in turn, affects

judgments of poetry, poets, people, and life.

A few years ago, Stephen Spender, the English poet New York loves best, was a guest at a dinner party given in his honor by a friend of mine, a marvelously gifted poet in his own right, who, for reasons no discerning reader of poetry needs to have explained in this day and age, has been published in two magazines in his whole life: *The Yale Literary Magazine* and *Chronicles*. Apart from having written two or three dozen poems that will live long after the magazines which published them have been forgotten (compared to Spender's two or three, in my view), this friend of mine has something of a reputation as The Last Gentleman in New York. He wanted to show his work to the celebrated Spender, but did not want to take advantage of a guest. In the end, after a few days' soul-searching, he dropped off a sheaf of poems at the hotel where the celebrated personage was staying. To make a long story short, he has not heard from him since.



I was introduced to Spender at the Causley exhibition and reminded him that he had never even thanked my friend for dinner. "He is the man with that big apartment on Park Avenue?" said the celebrated personage uncertainly, adding as a kind of interrogative afterthought: "And he writes a lot of poems?" My friend's name is Rudolph Schirmer, and the mind of one deserving the title of poet should have generated more interesting associations. In 1937, Charles Causley's first work, a play called *The Conquering Hero*, was published in America by Schirmer's.

But I have digressed. Welcome to *Chronicles*, Charles Causley.

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor for *Chronicles*.

# Letter From 'The Major's'

by James E. Treher

*For God, Country, and Kate Smith*

To that select few who have frequented its precincts, it is simply "The Major's." In reality it's the "Globe and Laurel," along Virginia's Route One near the main gate to the U.S. Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia. Its proprietor is a sandy haired, crewcut, toothbrush-mustached, immaculately turned out, retired Major of the U.S. Marine Corps: one Rick Spooner. A lionhearted World War II Veteran, who as a lad of 16 survived such horrors as Tarawa (over a thousand dead on the beach in the first 48 hours), the Major also recalls with quiet satisfaction his camaraderie-in-arms with the Royal British Marine Commando; hence the appellation "Globe and Laurel," insignia of those stout Brits who were the precursors of our very own Leathernecks. The tolerantly stern majordomo of a very proper hostelry of almost

19th-century milieu ("A Touch of Tradition," as its Inn sign proclaims) is a Kiplingesque curator of a veritable hall of memorabilia of the U.S. Marine Corps, the British Commandos, and the FBI, whose Academy for the past almost 50 years has been located on the base.

Decorum fitting a watering hole for gentlemen, soldiers, and others is *de rigueur* at the Major's, who has only to fix a cold eye on a temporary miscreant to restore propriety. Every inch of the walls (and the ceiling) of the Globe and Laurel is covered with the memories of war, battle flags, regimental honors, photographs of Field Grade Officers and heroes of lesser ranks, of poignant mementos of battles old and recent — and a couple generations of Marines and FBI Agents hold the Globe and Laurel in the same esteem in which the Foreign Legion held Sidi-bel-Abbes. In keeping with the set and the setting, the menu is restricted to prime rib and veal cordon bleu and blood-red steak broiled black. The pouring whiskeys are Jack Daniels and Johnny Walker Red, and the unfortunate ordering anything less than Beef-eaters is held in slight suspicion of failure to meet the Globe's required standards. But for all its refinements, this is not the habitat of the effete. The Marines, even in mufti, have the mien of men who have been through the crucible of war, and in uniform wear ribbons of most of the conflicts of our century, and the FBI Agents are veterans of those alley wars which are equally demanding, but for which ribbons are not issued. Good company in which to be, in the extremities just discussed, or when the glow is high — the imported beer flowing and the steaks charring, the Major at his *pater familias* best, and the sea stories at high tide — and a powerfully good place to be when that company and mood prevails.

All of which fond reflections were evoked with the recent news of the death of Kate Smith. Strange convergence, to be sure, but herein lies the nexus of a singer, a song, and the vagaries of a rather whimsical Inn.

A few years ago, during a best forgotten era in which demonstrative patriotism — among a host of other long honored virtues — was looked upon as rather an embarrassment to

the sophisticate, a quartet of interested businessmen, some stock brokers, and a network TV executive toured the FBI Academy with one of the Globe and Laurel's initiates. The entourage gravitated, eventually, to the Globe and Laurel for repast and refreshments. The company evolved, as it so often does at the Major's, to what a



poet once referred to as a "goodly crowd," of the usual genre — Marines, FBI Agents, visiting professional soldiers of various foreign military missions, and a sprinkling of law enforcement officers attending training sessions at the Academy. As counterpoint to the rough but fraternal badinage of hard guys from tough professions were heard the melodies of old, seemingly incongruous to this clientele — "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen" and "Moonlight Serenade" played by a unique pianist, Ray Baker, ordained Minister of the Gospel and marvelous entertainer — and the occasional recorded rendition of "Amazing Grace" by a bagpipe ensemble.

Sometime along that evening of yore, the music, erstwhile largely ignored, drifted into the strains of "God Bless America." Uncontrived and spontaneously, that goodly crowd was on its feet in unforgettable concert, pewter mugs lifted to the ceiling, and not a few wet eyes among men who knew the essence of that anthem — men who knew the blood and tears that sired that song. A visiting Brit, somewhat bemused, gently observed, "Not abashed at all, are you, you Yanks, about loving your country?"

I guess not. I hope we never are. Memory warms, things past beguile — but I wish there were more Major Spooners, more Globe and Laurels, and more Kate Smiths — and that we as a nation will forever sing and pray, "God Bless America."

*James E. Treher is an ex-Marine and a retired FBI Agent of 25 years service and was recently director of the Allegheny County Police Training Academy, Pittsburgh, PA.*

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