

and defiantly classical. His masterpieces (like the Sherman monument in front of the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan or the Diana that once stood on the pinnacle of the old Madison Square Garden) can hardly be understood without an appreciation of their classical roots. As Basil Gildersleeve told his Virginia audience in 1908, "I too would plead for an honest American literature, a literature of the soil, but the classics are in a measure our home, and Kipling quotes Horace as the burial service quotes a verse from a Greek comic poet. It is not a matter of blood, it is a matter of tradition."

Saint-Gaudens wrote of himself, "I always thought I was a kind of cosmopolitan, gelatinous fish; *pas du tout*, I belong in America." Saint-Gaudens is a good example of the American as a citizen of a United States of Europe. He studied in Paris and Rome, and was born of a French father and an Irish mother. His greatest works celebrated the Northern heroes of the Civil War: his Farragut and Sherman in New York, his standing Lincoln in Chicago. His monument to Robert Gould Shaw in the Boston Common gave us our most brilliant relief sculpture, as the traditions of the Arch of Titus return to life to honor the Boston aristocrat who led a black regiment in the war. Near the end of his life, Saint-Gaudens joined with Charles Follen McKim to found the American Academy in Rome, so that the traditions of the ancient world of art and scholarship would be preserved for future Americans.

Burke Wilkinson's tribute is based on much research, and his book has much to say about the artist's movements and emotions and even about his mistress. We get to know those great leaders of American art, Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White, and in Wilkinson's retelling White's shocking murder hits us as hard as it did Saint-Gaudens himself. We see what Europe meant to an American of those days. When Saint-Gaudens returned to America to work on the Farragut monument, his first major commission, he "was so homesick for Rome that he left the faucet running in his studio washbasin to remind him of the tinkling fountain in the Barberini Gardens." (I know the feeling.)

Sadly, the book's weaknesses are

many. The author does not write with distinction, his knowledge of history comes from textbooks, and he has little idea of the significance of the Classical past for Saint-Gaudens and his great contemporaries. Wilkinson is best on the wife, friends, and mistress. But to be just, when a more technical work on the artist is published it will owe much to Wilkinson's dutiful collection of evidence. Saint-Gaudens's work still speaks to us, or perhaps rather speaks to us again. I do not think anyone can understand Henry Adams unless he has confronted long and hard the mysterious Adams monument, sculpted to commemorate his wife (never mentioned in the *Education*) who committed suicide. Can we understand our own past until we stare into the faces of the winged Victory leading the wild-eyed Sherman? Saint-Gaudens, like Charles McKim and Basil Gildersleeve, tells us today that the barren spareness of the International Style and Hemingway's prose are not the only options; that a truly American creativity can be built on the Classical traditions of our civilization. That empty feeling in the pit of our stomachs, which we have been taught to call anomie and alienation, is not a fatal cancer. We are just a little homesick for Rome.

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## The Impossibility of a Book

by Ana Selic

*Pushkin House* by Andrei Bitov, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Andrei Bitov graduated from the Leningrad Mining Institute but chose to become a writer rather than a geologist. His new novel, *Pushkin House* (the second of his works translated into English), will probably share the "general acclaim" that greeted his short stories in *Life in the Windy Weather*, published a year ago. It is skillful enough to attract attention, and the varied typefaces, unfinished sentences, hints, and empty spaces between the

paragraphs will impress snobbish critics with the many different levels of meaning.

Eager literary explorers will have inexhaustible opportunities to draw parallels, to trace sources, and to perform their mental aerobics in essays that fill the pages of magazines specializing in literary theory and criticism.

Bitov's Lev Odoevtsev is the essence of all Russian classical heroes so far—an aristocrat born in Petersburg, with slightly confused ambitions and ideas, partially an idiot (though not a gambler), on the verge of having a duel to the death with his arch-enemy. He is obsessed all the while with a Nastasya Filipovna under a different name. His crucial flaw, however, is to have been born in modern Soviet Russia, thereby ruining his chances for a respectable tragic ending.

Besides intentionally constructing his book on the foundations laid by Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, and Dostoyevsky—their writings, destinies, and heroes, and their undisputable role in establishing the greatness of the Russian written word—Bitov cannot refrain from further interventions, elaborations, and comments, like a baker convinced that his already rich cake needs an additional cup of sugar.

By serving us Lyova's loves, friends, and power games in one version as well as all the other possible ones, Bitov tries to tell us that in today's Russia not only heroes are killed before they are born, but so is art itself. His final statement about not wanting to deal with his hero anymore because he does not wish him incarcerated in a dusty volume or locked in a determined destiny is meant as a gesture of solidarity with all the possible heroes strangled by the bleak everyday life of his country with its background of labor camps, party secretaries, and mass parades for the nth anniversary of the revolution. But Bitov falls into his own trap: his thesis that such a sequel to greatness both in art and life is more than tragic—that is, his thesis of the impossibility of a book—is an epitaph altogether lost in his weighty volume. After all, there is no proof that the world of imagination has been so depopulated since Bulgakov's times.

Unwittingly, Bitov admits that himself: in this novel there are marvelous passages glowing with life. He gives a

wonderful sketch of the two Natashas coming from who-knows-where to the spontaneous party at the Pushkin House, Lyova's place of employment. Their hair wrapped in gauze, they sit beside each other on a worn-out sofa pretending not to know why they are there and absolutely refusing to take vodka; instead, they drink their tea from the saucers. Bitov would have done better to trust his own mastery instead of striving for more.

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## Phi Beta Kappa Fake

by Jane Greer

***Most Likely to Succeed: Six Women From Harvard and What Became of Them*** by Fran Schumer, New York: Random House; \$17.95.

When I was 11, I saw a photo of the Radcliffe campus in fall, with a beautiful long-haired blonde in a plaid wool skirt sitting on a flight of leaf-covered steps in front of a red brick building. (Fran Schumer saw a similar picture.) A beautiful long-haired blonde is what I hoped to be someday, and I immediately started a savings account in a toy safe labeled "Effildar Dnuf" (the words were in code to fool my mother or anyone else who might be snooping around my room). Several weeks later, I blew the whole cache at the swimming pool. Apparently I made a wise decision.

*Most Likely to Succeed* is a "good read." Fran Schumer is intelligent, insightful, and knows how to laugh at herself and to recognize the folly of all youth. She has a fine way with words and a witty turn of phrase as she takes us through Radcliffe/Harvard 1970-74 (just one year's difference from when I would have been there, had I persevered). We come to know — intimately — Tess, Eleanor, Paige, Daisy, Felicity, and the author, and to watch schools of men swim naked through the co-ed dorms. ("I'm surprised grown-ups let us behave like that," a friend commented in later years.") The girls are all likable, and wacky as can be: prodigies

turned loose in Bedlam (Schumer was a freshman at age 16). In the second part of the book, she brings us up to 1984 in the lives of most of these women; one of them killed herself.

Schumer makes me remember what I'd rather forget; the way I felt at the small Midwestern state university I attended but was too immature to analyze. She has captured the administration's quick and incomprehensible willingness to help students trash all norms and accepted values, the children aged 16 to 22 trying without success to get some limits imposed from above, the drinking, the class-skipping, the lethargy, the self-involvement. And the left-winged, Bomb-fearing despair, with no one (except our parents, whom we were there to escape) to suggest that a little hard work, a little less self-analysis, might just do the trick. I came to like the young women in this book, and was glad to be reassured that most of them grew up and learned to be happy.

"Six Women From Harvard and What Became of Them": A genuine slice of life, an interesting piece of research, no? No. After I'd finished the book, I read the credits and found this: "*The individuals depicted on the following pages are composite figures, based on my observation of many friends and acquaintances, in college and elsewhere, across a number of years. . . . My aim is not to offer a journalistic account of the period, but to tell a series of stories whose heart and soul are true.*" Well, the book's heart and soul may be true, but its guts are phony, and I'm steamed. I'd assumed the names were changed, but now I don't know *what* to believe. *Most Likely to Succeed* is fiction, with a blatantly false subtitle stuck on it. As an account of a real time, a real campus, and real people, it would have been fairly effective journalism. As fiction — and coy, dishonest fiction, at that — it fails because it has no point. Anyone can lump together a bunch of real traits and call the result a "composite"; with a composite and a quarter, you can make a phone call.

Schumer has reported for various newspapers, been an editor at the *Boston Globe*, published fiction in all the right places, won a Goodman Loan Award for fiction, and coauthored Mary Cunningham's best-seller,

*Powerplay*. She's a gifted writer, but the line between fact and fiction is not nearly so fine as she pretends here.

Jane Greer is editor of Plains Poetry Journal.

## No Water in the Wine

by James L. Sauer

***Chesterton, Seer of Science*** by Stanley Jaki, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Stanley Jaki, a Catholic priest and a prolific historian of science, has produced a series of scholarly, at times plodding, essays derived from lectures he delivered at Notre Dame. It purports to be the first full treatment of Chesterton and science. He offers us a fair picture of the intuitive genius of Chesterton, whose common and artistic sense allowed him to be both an interpreter as well as a champion of traditional science, while standing as a caustic critic of the eugenicists and those who would direct man's development along "scientific lines."

Chesterton's paradoxical Thomism did not fail him when he dealt with the spirit of modern science and the practical horrors scientific mechanisms can bring forth. As Jaki points out, "Chesterton's chief interest in science always centered on its possible threat to the freedom of the will," that is, to the practical consequences of abstract scientific pontification on the social, artistic, and moral responsibility of being human. To Chesterton the consequences of science divorced from the divine reason from which the world sprang must inevitably result in terrible crimes.

It must be understood that Chesterton was not anti-science; his enemy was scientism. "Scientism, or the claim that only the scientific or quantitative method yields valid knowledge and reliable value judgments," says Jaki, "provoked Chesterton to many devastating and penetrating remarks." Of course, it did not take much to provoke Chesterton to wisdom or at least wit. He rose to battle the giants of the new religion of scientific reason with joyous fervor: Huxley, Spencer, Haeckel, Bradlaugh, and