

plishment goes beyond vocalism and distinguishes a great musician. Other people have pretty voices or nice clothes or get photographed in nightclubs, but only Callas could sing Norma and Elvira and Violetta as she did at her best. Her immortality is secure, even if the most refined estimate of her accomplishment is only now beginning—with Michael Scott.

Without credit of received opinion and without compromise of human frailty, Mr. Scott has thoroughly explored the life and art of Maria Callas—a woman whom he sees as truly alive only through her performances. He emphasizes the early years as her greatest ones and punctures the notion that hers was a specifically dramatic talent. I don't completely agree with every one of his judgments—I like the 1955 Berlin *Lucia* and the 1957 *Anna Bolena* better than he does—but I find his treatment more than convincing. I never thought anyone could elevate my regard for Callas. As it is, he has taught me much about her—and something too about straight thinking in the composition of a biography.

In the context of excellence I will mention that the word “fulsome” is misused more than once and that comma splices abound—there are two in the paragraph quoted above. But as Emily Litella used to say, “Never mind.” Scott's life of Callas has fixed for us the image of an heroic talent—the gift that drove her to sing recitatives better than her rivals could sing arias. He has even reported acne and dandruff in order to dispel a cosmetized image that nevertheless represented someone grand. That is not to say that the woman Maria Callas, as distinct from the musician, is not here. I mean only that for once a contemporary biography does not drown in details: the tail does not wag the dog, or perhaps I should say that the train of the gown does not direct the diva. It was the grandeur of the artist that made the woman of interest, and not the other way around. Yes, Callas is here; the truth of her personal life is here. But that truth is held firmly in proportion to its value and significance. Scott knows well the magnitude of the real achievement and quotes an early witness to the labor that beauty demands: “When she came on the first day of rehearsals I gave her the score and told her that I would go through her part the next day from start to finish. But when she arrived I found

that she knew it all in detail, phrase by phrase. . . . She had learned it all in one day. . . . That is talent. It was not just a question of having a voice, it was also the love of hard work. . . . Talent means a strength which impels you to study.” W. B. Yeats—who wrote “Adam's Curse”—likewise understood, “That we must labour to be beautiful.”

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The Right Fork

by Brian Doherty

Better Than Plowing and Other
Personal Essays

by James M. Buchanan
Chicago: University of Chicago Press;
194 pp., \$23.95



“I ask myself again why anyone would find interest in the private dimensions of my own history,” muses Nobel laureate economist James M. Buchanan in his new collection of personal and intellectual autobiographical essays. The question, embedded in an essay entitled “Country Aesthetic,” which explores the manifold and profound meanings that the concept of country, and more importantly the concept of owning the land on which one lives, has for Buchanan, answers itself. Exploring the mind of a writer and thinker of Buchanan's caliber is its own reward.

Buchanan is the founding father and linchpin of the “Virginia School” of economics, whose founding work was accomplished at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. The Virginia School's prime contribution, for which Buchanan was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 1986, is public choice theory, which upsets the shibboleths of interventionist economists (who assume government to be the perfect solution to all perceived “market failures”) by applying the standard of self-interested *homo economicus* to government actors as well as private ones.

This approach allows for consideration of the notion—heretical to big-government economists—that governments can fail in their supposed goals

of disinterestedly pursuing the larger social good in the same way they like to accuse free markets of failing. They can no longer stack the analytical deck by comparing actual market performance to an arid, unrealistic vision of disinterested government perfection.

As Buchanan puts it, “the lasting contribution of public choice theory has been to correct this obvious imbalance in analysis. Any institutional comparison that is worthy of serious considerations must compare relevant alternatives; if market organization is to be replaced by politicized order . . . the two institutional structures must be evaluated on the basis of predictions as to how they will actually work. Political failure, as well as market failure, must become central to the comprehensive analysis that precedes normative judgment.”

Better Than Plowing provides only a brief and general summary of the economic thought for which Buchanan is famous. And if the public choice approach strikes the reader as the application of mere common sense, not worthy of world-class accolades, Buchanan feels the same way (“my surprise . . . is . . . at the failure of other economists to have acknowledged the simple and the obvious, which is all that I have ever claimed my work to be”); and yet it is in large part thanks to him that it has become customary in economics to apply such skeptical analysis to the actions of government.

Buchanan's wise and personable modesty about his achievements pervades the book, as does a quiet pride in his Southern roots and the self-sufficiency of his country lifestyle. He describes himself as “a country boy from Middle Tennessee, educated in rural public schools and a local public teachers college, who is not associated with an establishment university, who has never shared the academically fashionable soft left ideology, who has worked in a totally unorthodox subject matter with very old-fashioned tools of analysis.” He wants his reader to grasp the lesson that “if Jim Buchanan can get a Nobel Prize, anyone can.” It is charming of Buchanan to hold this notion, reflecting well on his generosity of character. But the essays collected in this book put the lie to it. In his solid intellectual analysis, his self-sufficiency, and his love of work, Buchanan proves himself a better man than just anyone.

Buchanan offers his rural boyhood,

his early college education at the Middle Tennessee State Teachers College, and his work on the Operations Staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific theater during World War II as examples of his typicality; this could have been the life of any other Southern boy of his generation, he suggests. But it seems as if these experiences forged instead his singularity. He writes nonelegiacally about his working childhood on a farm and the day-to-day deprivations that did not seem to him to be deprivations; about being a day student riding into town and back to the farm in his early college days; of the precise and never-ending work of tracking location and direction of movement for the U. S. fleet in the Pacific under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. He presents his life as if he believes it could have been anyone's and could have turned him into anyone.

He muses on the nature of fate and circumstance in the words of a country tune he composed in his youth ("My mother discouraged me from even listening to country music, but it was so much a part of Middle Tennessee that all of us variously imagined ourselves to be songwriters"): "There are too many forks in the road, / There are too many forks in the road, / And I never could learn / Not to take the wrong turn. / There are too many forks in the road."

While contemplating the way any different choice along the path of his life would have deposited him in a place miles and worlds away from the man he is now, Buchanan is led to the conclusion that "exogenous event and chance may be far more relevant than personal choices." He may believe this. But the character forged through the choices of his rural, Southern boyhood survives today in the almost transcendent satisfaction he experiences in the "physical engagement with the earth itself" that his current life (in a home that he largely built himself from the ground up, on land where he grows his own food) provides him. And this character, forged and tested through the choices he has made, is a necessary part of the man he reveals in this homey, sensible, and delightful book.

His character also defines the economic research program that earned him his renown. His dedication to free trade is rooted in his Southern identity: "I sensed that the free trade principle was indeed central to the traditional democratic-southern-populist set of val-

ues" and that "this principle had been subverted . . . by the protectionist-monopolist interest of the East and North." His experience of discrimination against himself and his fellow Southerners by a cadet officer in the Army gave him a permanent dislike for the entrenched interests of Eastern elites who lord over and disdain the bulk of the citizenry.

His rural background, far removed from the depredations of the government whose skewed workings Buchanan has spent a career analyzing, also seems key in cementing individuals and their choices at the heart of his economic approach. Buchanan may poor-mouth himself and his economic achievements, but that is merely the pleasing modesty of the Southern boy who has worked, worked hard and worked well; and who has earned the sense of independence, security, and achievement that he seems to have taken from his life. Buchanan comes across as a delightful and intellectually powerful man; and, as like precedes from like, he has produced a delightful and intellectually powerful set of memoirs.

Brian Doherty writes from Washington, D.C.

Classic Colonialism

by *Wayne Lutton*

Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of "English Only"

by *James Crawford*

Reading, Massachusetts:

Addison-Wesley; 324 pp., \$24.95



Almost alone among the peoples of the world, the United States has largely been spared—at least until recently—the bitter conflicts that plague countries whose citizens do not share a common language. Since the early 17th century, immigrants from diverse backgrounds have settled here. In the past, it was understood that in exchange for enjoying opportunities for personal development and economic advancement and a measure of political equality unavailable elsewhere, newcomers would learn English, acquire a useful skill, and participate in community life by be-

coming citizens. That was what "Americanization" involved. This covenant between America and successive generations of immigrants worked pretty well as long as it was observed by both parties. But this unwritten compact has undergone a drastic revision since the 1960's.

In the wake of Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory in 1964 over Barry Goldwater, the Great Society Congress passed a new immigration act that departed from our previous policy of well-regulated entry. The "national origin" quotas that had been in effect since the early 1920's were eliminated. The 1965 act established a system emphasizing family ties over other considerations. Although proponents of the new law, such as its sponsor in the Senate, Ted Kennedy, claimed that the act would eliminate discrimination, what it actually accomplished—just as Senator Sam Ervin predicted it would—was discrimination against traditional immigrant groups in favor of natives of Third World countries. By exploiting provisions for family reunification, individuals with large families and many relatives were thus able to practice what has since become known as "chain migration." The entry of millions of people from Latin America and Asia coincided with a breakdown of institutional support for assimilation, exemplified by bilingual education and voting. Later, affirmative action preferences were extended to those possessing limited fluency in English.

In *Hold Your Tongue*, James Crawford, a former Washington editor of *Education Week*, discusses the rise of bilingualism and of the grass-roots opposition to it that emerged in the early 1980's. Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968; by the mid-1970's the federal government was funding an assortment of programs in 26 different languages. Although proficiency in English is supposed to be a condition for naturalization, in 1975 Congress mandated that bilingual ballots be made available.

The Supreme Court ventured into this arena with its *Lau v. Nichols* decision in 1974. In this case, the court decreed that public schools must take "affirmative steps" to compensate for a child's lack of fluency in English. In 1982, in *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court ruled five to four that states must provide public education at the elemen-