

down, and hist him over in de middle of dem blackberry bushes.” When they report the attack to their mistress, whose husband is away, she does not hesitate to fire the overseer on the spot. Although the episode illustrates the danger of putting women under the power of a man who is not their husband or father, the story has a happier ending than if it took place in the armed forces or the White House.

If the introductory chapters constitute a social history of the Old South, the chapters dealing with the Hardys’ declining fortunes during and after the war read more like a tragic narrative. By 1860, Squire William Eppes Hardy had already lost six of his 12 children. As the storm clouds gathered, he experienced the marriage and departure of his daughter and the deaths of a son and of his own mother. In the course of the war, his nephew Willie Hardy was shot dead at First Manassas, and Kibler records the deaths of son after son of the Hardys’ neighbors. In the spring of 1864, the squire’s son Haywood died of a prolonged illness he had contracted in Virginia. A younger son, William Dixon Hardy (Captain Dick, as he came to be known), survived the war and presided over the dwindling fortunes and acreage of the family. At the end of the war, the estate, even while it was still intact, was valued at only 15 percent of its former worth—a good measure of what South Carolina suffered as a whole, even in areas that the pyromaniacal Sherman did not succeed in burning.

The post-war cast of characters in the Hardy saga is narrower, and—as happens in so many societies on their last legs—the eccentricities become more marked. Captain Dick Hardy, the war veteran who returns to keep the place going, emerges as an archetype of the defeated South: proud, hard-working, but too honorable to save the sinking ship.

When I spoke with him last summer about *Our Fathers’ Fields*, Kibler told me that he regarded his book as a kind of a novel. After reading the first few chapters, I was unable to figure out what he meant. It is not simply the technical discussions of plantation management—*Moby Dick* has thornier passages on the physiology of whales. A novel has to be an integrated narrative with something at the center. By the time I put the book down, I realized that there is a center, and it is the house itself and the family that lived in it. If, as Mel Bradford used to

say, Southern fiction is always the story of families, not of individuals, then *Our Fathers’ Fields* works not only as a Southern novel but as a full-blown Southern Agrarian novel that takes us from an antebellum Golden Age through the years of conquest and desolation down to the current resurrection. In putting together this book and restoring the house that is at its center, James Kibler has simultaneously lived and written the story of the South: its rise, its fall, and—if it is up to the likes of Professor Kibler—its renewal.

Thomas Fleming is the editor of Chronicles.

A Rainbow Bridge

by Andrei Navrozov

Cyril Connolly: A Life
by Jeremy Lewis
North Pomfret, Vermont:
Trafalgar Square;
675 pp., \$50.00



“What is there to say about someone who did nothing all his life but sit on his bottom and write reviews?” Thus the subject of this biography, who saw himself as a modern Sainte-Beuve, once excoriated Sainte-Beuve in a private letter. To his biographer, Cyril Connolly’s lament is so self-revealing, so emblematic of the life he chronicles that he uses it as the epigraph to this exhaustive, at times almost maddeningly detailed, critical biography. For Jeremy Lewis as for Connolly, the artist is above all his own artistic sensibility, even if sterility, obesity, and torpidity (to say nothing of humbuggery and plain old buggery) should be the objective final result of his endeavors. “Were it that I would have such a champion!” is every literary poseur’s chops-licking thought from here to Timbuktu.

Certainly the fantastically decorative bridge between the artist’s consciousness and his life’s tangible achievement has the closing decades of the last century for its main support. The ornate wrought-iron span, shaped like the grille of a monastic locutory whose fanciful prototypes one can find in the selfless solipsism of Dostoyevsky and Huysmans and

Wilde, is clearly outlined against the mother-of-pearl, slightly chipped Watteau of English sky between the World Wars, and in retrospect it may well be argued that the sometimes invisible, though always measurable, stress of nostalgia inherent in the rationally tenuous structure is exactly what was making the “music of time” all along. Now and then Lewis’s book is too passively descriptive even for an enthusiast of period ephemera, and yet as a detailed architect’s drawing of that most miraculous of 20th-century cultural miracles—England’s amazing musical bridge 1890-1930—it is simply invaluable.

What Connolly meant to say, by way of socratically boastful self-abasement, was that if he was Sainte-Beuve (“a better artist, yet a weaker one, than any of the contemporaries whom he criticises”), then Stephen Spender was Hugo, W.H. Auden was Lamartine, and Louis MacNeice was Musset. No argument there, especially if, uncharitably, we equate weakness with getting out of bed before noon, or charitably compare it to being inept at the kind of public relations for which literary careerism in the 20th century is famous: concealing one’s appetite for (even innocent) pleasure, eschewing genuine eccentricities like keeping lemurs and ferrets (instead of deadlines), and holding sufficiently implacable (or at least fashionably timed) leftist views. No argument there, as I say, except that Connolly’s contemporaries also included his schoolmate at St. Cyprian’s and later at Eton, George Orwell.

Even if one does not identify Orwell with that sobering, slap-hard sense of truth for which the century may be remembered long after so many of the delicately evasive sensibilities of both the “weaker” Connolly and of his stronger contemporaries have been forgotten, the fact is that among the literary figures active at the time and moving in the same or intersecting London circles were—in alphabetical order, ransacking the index to Lewis’s book and leaving out the expatriate Paris of Hemingway and Joyce where Connolly liked to frolic whenever he had enough money for the ferry—A.J. Ayer, John Betjeman, Lawrence Durrell, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, Robert Graves, Graham Greene, Aldous Huxley, Arthur Koestler, Wyndham Lewis, Somerset Maugham, Malcolm Muggeridge, Anthony Powell, V.S. Pritchett, Peter Quennell, assorted Sackville-Wests, Sitwells, and Strachey, Dylan Thomas,

Evelyn Waugh, Virginia Woolf. . . . The names are only a hint at the true dimensions of that amazing rainbow-like bridge, and whichever way you look at it, up or down, Connolly's playing Sainte-Beuve against the three contemporaries he had hand-picked for the purposes of benign self-identification is reminiscent of Mayakovsky's ingenious claim that his deadliest competitor for the position of Russia's greatest living poet was "Nick," meaning a certain Nikolai Aseev.

And yet the Connolly case is more complicated than that. Just as Eiffel's engineering represented the power of reason, so the amazing feat of English culture bridging the centuries was meant to glorify irrationality, imagination, joviality, mysticism, childishness, paganism, capriciousness, uselessness, playfulness, ambivalence, narcissism, all surviving precariously in the wrong place at the wrong time, and all ultimately doomed. And just as to subsequent generations the giant lacework pylon in the middle of Paris is a hopelessly old-fashioned folly, so what was expressly meant as a folly, an indulgence, and an act of nostalgia is looking less foolish with every passing day. It is our respect for the triumph of Connolly's peers, and of the rainbow-high arch they have left behind to commemorate it, that prevents us from dismissing an individual toiler like Connolly as a pompous babbler full of strong liquor and quaint bluff.

Hence the title of Connolly's collected essays, *The Condemned Playground*, and hence the longing for Eden that runs through the chapters of Lewis's biography like a spinning top. For Connolly as for so many of his contemporaries, "Eden" was consonant with "Eton" to the end of the lapsarian thereafter: "Few things are more disturbing than the barren aspect of the present world when the taste of honeydew still lingers in the mouth," he wrote, and Lewis comments on "the notion—familiar to generations of public-school Englishmen, albeit in cruder, more boisterous form—of life thereafter as intrinsically anticlimactic." One inevitable consequence was the self-confessed "curse of one's creative intelligence being always so many years younger than the critical," with the result that Connolly was never able to write anything as complete or coherent as his milieu expected of him. His only attempt at a novel, *The Rock Pool*, was published in 1935.

And yet the Connolly case, I repeat, is

less straightforward than one of arrested development or literary failure. Even without extolling the two books that lift him with any degree of flying-carpet objectivity above the epoch's raconteurs and unsuccessful novelists—the patchwork quilts of *The Unquiet Grave* and *Enemies of Promise*—one is quite sure that the person capable of writing the following lines was endowed with a critical intelligence that was also creative:

I am too much of a snob to be a bohemian and much too fond, not only of security, but of a sense of respect and social power. I can't bear to be disapproved of by waiters, porters, hotel managers, hunting men, barbers, bank clerks, though I wouldn't mind writing anything that would annoy them—I can't bear to be unpopular though I enjoy being hated.

Elsewhere he writes, in the same vein: "I hate colonels, but I don't like the people who make fun of them."

What I would argue is that far from being ordinarily clever, Connolly's self-deprecating self-aggrandizing is a direct descendant of Dostoyevsky's "underground man" and the obsessively introspective literary culture, in Russia, France, and elsewhere on the Continent, of the 1890's. By the 1930's, it lived on only in England, that condemned playground of Connolly's milieu, and today it lies buried deep under the volcanic debris of egalitarianism and collectivization where a modern-day Sainte-Beuve like Connolly, to say nothing of a modern-day Dostoyevsky like Orwell, would instantly suffocate. Not surprisingly, reviewing Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, it was the "delicious cynicism" of the book that Connolly most admired, "that subtle, metallic kind" of humor "which, more than anything else, seems a product of this generation." Equally unsurprising is the fact that Orwell referred to Connolly in print as "almost the only novel-reviewer in England who does not make me sick."

The hero of *The Rock Pool*, Connolly's stab at a novel, reasons that "if sex and snobbery, at which he was a failure, were going out, he was no better fitted for the Communism and hope that were coming in." His solution, which his creator could never afford to put into practice despite a clumsy attempt to marry into a little American money, is to buy a house

in the English countryside, Palladian ideally, there to "cultivate obscurity and practice failure, so repulsive in others, in oneself of course the only dignified thing." Instead Connolly turned to publishing, and the unexpectedly successful *Horizon* ran throughout the 1940's, filling the void left by the war-time closing of such journals as Eliot's *Criterion* and Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse*. To the commie pinko Herbert Read, the new magazine was "the last flicker of pre-war decadence, a post-Proustian inquest on a dead epoch." Connolly himself saw it accordingly:

Editing a magazine is a form of the good life; it is creating when the world is destroying, helping where it is hindering; being given once a month the opportunity to produce a perfect number and every month failing, and just when despair sets in, being presented with one more chance.

"We must be serious," he wrote in a letter, fusing, in his customary way, the narcissism of one of fortune's darlings with the aplomb of a perfect failure. "We must live as though the world is going to end." And end it did, because the Battle for Britain was not only the World War. It was also a battle "against the politician, the culture-diffusionist, and the victorious common man" in which Connolly's modest, and only, weapon was presenting himself as "the last literary gent" left on earth.

Certainly by the time he died, in 1974, that description was almost literally true. The battle in defense of individualism had been lost the world over. But because it was in Etonian, puerile, fey little England that unserious Connolly and his flippant generation had made their last stand against the encroaching adulthood of concentration camps and hamburger chains, history will surely record that it is in stubborn, contrary England that the "music of time" has sounded the longest before dissolving, like the arc of a rainbow or an imaginary bridge or some other amazing mirage, into the grey, demotic sameness of totalitarian drizzle.

Connolly used to say that memorials were only important to social climbers, so I may as well end on this vanishing note.

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Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

Paleo-Malthusianism

“Parson,” wrote the Tory radical William Cobbett in an open letter to Thomas Malthus in 1819, “I have, during my life, detested many men; but never any one so much as you.” Cobbett’s hatred of Malthus, the founder of modern population science, is comparable to the dislike that most conservatives feel toward him today, though they probably would not care for Cobbett, an unsparing critic of the ravenous industrial capitalism of the early 19th century, any more than for the author of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published exactly 200 years ago in 1798.

It is not surprising that most conservatives have not exactly waxed exuberant about the anniversary. They regard Malthus as the father of “population planning” and of the idea that too many people can be a bad thing, and in addition, growth-maniacs like the late Julian Simon hold the harelipped demographer and English clergyman responsible for the even more wicked idea that infinite and unrestricted economic growth is not necessarily a good thing. Thus, Malthus takes it on the lip from both wings of the “conservative movement,” from the religious right and the anti-abortion, anti-birth control faction as well as from the libertarians, who like to insist that there is no environmental or population problem that cannot be solved satisfactorily by building a few more strip malls.

As usual, both sides of the “conservative movement” are wrong, not least because they have completely lost contact with the conservative intellectual tradition and are not able to recognize it when it slaps them in the face. It is no small irony that a few years ago demographer Michael Teitelbaum pointed out that Karl Marx and his heirs hated Malthus at least as much as modern conservatives do and that “right-wing thinking in the United States was moving dramatically toward the old-line Marxist tradition.”

New right and libertarian think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, began to argue that rapid

population growth was, at worst, a neutral factor in economic development—and indeed might be a positive force so long as the “correct” economic system were in place. These arguments were energetically promoted in “back-grounders” aimed at a receptive Reagan White House.

The convergence of contemporary conservatism and communism on the issue of Malthusian ideas is simply part of the convergence of right and left that has been fairly obvious for a couple of decades now, a convergence represented by such major minds as those of Jack Kemp and Newt Gingrich. You need not worry that you missed the gala sponsored by Heritage and Cato celebrating the 200th anniversary of Malthus’s essay. There was no such gala, and even if there had been, those who did observe the anniversary would not have been welcome.

The anniversary was in fact celebrated in a special issue of the *Social Contract*, a quarterly journal devoted mainly to immigration and the demographic, environmental, and cultural problems it causes, and also in a short book by John F. Rohe, *A Bicentennial Malthusian Essay: Conservation, Population, and the Indifference to Limits*, published by Rhodes & Easton in Traverse City, Michigan. Neither the *Social Contract* nor Mr. Rohe, a lawyer, mechanical engineer, and environmental activist, is conservative, at least not part of the “movement,” but through their sympathy for Malthus, they have independently rediscovered some of the fundamental concepts of the conservative tradition that the conservative movement has long since dispatched to the toxic waste dump.

The most famous principle articulated by Malthus was that while population increases geometrically, the food supply on which population depends increases only arithmetically. The implication is obvious enough: Sooner or later, there will be far more people than there is food to sustain them, and the result will be mass starvation. Malthus, as Mr. Rohe and other Malthusians today acknowledge, did not anticipate such goodies as the “Green Revolution,” by which it is

possible to make unproductive land yield food and to crank out, through chemicals and artificial breeding, far more crops than could be produced in early 19th-century England. Nor did he anticipate that the cultivation of vast new territories in North America, Latin America, and Asia would increase the supply of food far beyond what could be produced in his day. These omissions offer immense comfort to the anti-Malthusians, who never cease to whoop about how Malthus did not know what he was talking about and how, if he had only lived to see modern Hong Kong, he could not possibly have voiced any objection to such a utopia.

But the point is larger than Malthus’s specific predictions. Malthus’s essential point was that there are limits to what human beings can do and be, and that if we exceed those limits, we will have a problem. I will spare the reader the statistics on global food production, energy use, and population growth offered by neo-Malthusians, but whether those figures and the ominous extrapolations from them are correct or not, the larger point is surely true. Indeed, conservatives in particular ought to know that it is true because conservatism revolves around it.

“Conservatism,” wrote the conservative historian Sir Lewis Namier, “is primarily based on a proper recognition of human limitations, and cannot be argued in a spirit of self-glorifying logic.” Whether it can be argued or not, the recognition of limits has been a distinguishing characteristic of conservative thought from the time of Burke and de Maistre down to that of Russell Kirk and M.E. Bradford, and the denial of limits has been a characteristic of the left since it first crept from the womb in the Renaissance. The very recognition of “human nature” implies limits, since it means that human beings are one thing and not another, that there are some things human beings cannot do or be and some kinds of society that human beings cannot create or sustain. And while conservatives have always insisted that human nature exists and does not change, it is the left—mainly, in this century, in the work of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and John Dewey—that insists