

It could be said of the kindly treatment always received by Sir Boyle what an Ulster MP once said of Northern Ireland: "We have to go back centuries for a parallel to such treatment and even then we don't find it."

Sir Boyle's resolute refusal to be "on message" should be emulated by the present crop of Labour MPs, who rather disgustingly try to outdo themselves in sycophancy to Tony Blair. This has caused Blair to start treating Parliament in a rather cavalier fashion (excuse the pun!) by usually neglecting to turn up for Prime Minister's Questions and by declaring war on a sovereign state without bothering to take Parliament into his confidence.

Other, too-little known Westminster heroes include the imperialist who noted memorably the taxonomically unclassifiable quality of the British lion when he boasted: "One thing of which you may be certain—whether the British lion is roaming the plains of Canada or climbing the mountains of India, it will not draw in its horns or slink into its shell!"

Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the temperance campaigner, showed that even teetotalers can make jokes when he observed of one of his strongest opponents, a man well known for his hail-fellow-well-met qualities: "The Hon Member is about to make a speech on the subject of drink, for I see him sitting there evidently full of his subject."

Even if Sir Wilfrid must have generally been rather tiresome company (this excellent joke notwithstanding), we could all do with more people like him nowadays, and we definitely need many more Sir Boyles, more individualists speaking and voting in Westminster and living in London. This is just one more reason why Labour's class war against the House of Lords is so much to be regretted by all those who love England, as it is tending to push out the eccentrics from that house and usher in the social workers and polytechnic lecturers. London's dining rooms will be duller—and Britain's governance, worse—for their Lordship's absence.

There is still a deep well of resilience in London, a kind of good-humored pride which is summarized in "the Blitz spirit," a little phrase all real Londoners understand instinctively. This spirit may well be the saving of London. But it needs to be focused and directed toward specific ends, and the performance of the present-day Conservative Party does not

exactly inspire confidence in our future. One must hope that the inexperienced 19th-century Conservative MP was right when he said: "We on this side of the house are not such fools as we look."

Derek Turner is the editor of Right Now!, published in London.

Letter From Venice

by Andrei Navrozov

American Italics, or Revelation According to P.T. Barnum



As in some picaresque dream, the carousel that has been spinning out a tale of broken hearts and mistaken identities begins to slow down, the roulette wheel grows disenchanted with the last bourgeois revolution, and all of a sudden even the drum of the concrete mixer that is shadowing the Venetian's limousine all the way to the airport grinds to a gravelly stop. *Lady and gentlemen*, as my friend Gusov might say when in a pompous mood, *I have been to Las Vegas, I have seen the beginning of the end, and I now know what the salt that has lost its savor tastes like*. But meanwhile, like the dove with the olive leaf in its beak, I am returning to the ark of the narrative, and now the stillness and the smell of the sea are once more all about me, and already the water taxi is going full throttle under a waning moon that looks like a *piano nobile* badly divided among the brothers after a century and a half of family quarrels.

The place where we chose to stay could have been Augustan Rome constructed in a majestic Greco-Roman style, that is to say, Caesars Palace, or Italy as Mazzini invented it and hence of no particular period, the Bellagio. *More than a thousand fountains, enhanced by music and lights. State-of-the-art fog and audio systems. The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. Synchronized swimmers, divers, contortionists, trapeze artists, and others perform incredible feats. This facility is a non-commercial venue dedicated to the presentation of high-quality art exhibitions*. Or it could have been Paris—Paris, France—because there is one in Vegas, you know, complete with *the Eiffel Tower tour and Restaurant. Rustic finishes have been ap-*

plied to ensure that each structure is unique and appears appropriately weathered for its age. The ambience is very European and charming, and the shops are provincial and unique. Or I could have gone to the Excalibur. *Ever dream of traveling back in time to an age of jousting knights? This is your opportunity to enter the world of King Arthur. Or else we could have stayed at the Tropicana, a bit of Polynesia in the desert, with its colorful prints and wood-and-bamboo furnishings.*

But for reasons no longer obvious even to my longtime gambling companion, I had decided on the *upscale Venetian, along nearly a quarter-mile of Venice's famed Grand Canal, where for a small fee you can take a gondola ride and be serenaded in an authentic gondola by a singing gondolier wearing authentic gear.* We breakfasted at a restaurant called *Tintoretto*:

TINTORETTO

MENU

Starting at 4.00 pm

The Home Made MAMMA

Dinner \$21.95

—Breakfast Any Time—

Served with Italian Toast and Potatoes with Bell Peppers and Onions
Veggie, Cheese, or Ham Omelette
\$6.95 each

Bagel with Cream Cheese
and Lox \$9.95

15% Gratuity will be added
on parties of six or more.

I suppose I ought to say something about the gambling. Not contented with having added an extra number to the wheel, thus boosting the house's advantage over the player from 2.7 percent to 5.26 percent in what they call "American" roulette, these P.T. Barnums have even redesigned the single-zero "French" roulette wheel—known throughout Europe, incidentally, as "American"—to make the wells more shallow, the frets flatter, and the center cone lower. Hence what, in the better London clubs, is still a suicidally dangerous game of observation, extrapolation, and inference, is here reduced to a mechanized variant of lotto, ideal for old ladies who wish to lose their life savings slowly, one dollar at a time. In London, betting a thousand pounds per spin is barely respectable, while here, after Gusov and I had kept \$1,000 on the

layout for an hour, a crowd something like a hundred strong gathered to gape and bleat.

The place I visited is not the old utopia of gangsters' craps-shooting molls, of wedding chapels and cash loans, of tail fins and bail bondsmen. It is the new America, a place where actuary tables and shopping malls are churches, museums, and concert halls, a state of mind where the lowest common denominator of the chemically tranquilized millipede defines all beauty, all culture, and all history. *There are 127,000 hotel rooms, more than New York or Paris. The finest collection of owner-operated restaurants in the world. Premier gaming in a Venetian palazzo.* It has nothing to do with gambling—that is to say, with risk—and everything to do with the pursuit of idleness, which is the true revolutionary ideal of mankind. More than once during my sojourn, I was reminded of the scene in Lampedusa's *The Leopard* when the Prince is approaching Palermo besieged by Garibaldist rabble, passing the shuttered convents and the domes of the darkened monasteries:

And at that hour, at night, they were despots of the scene. It was against them really that the bonfires were lit on the hills, stoked by men who were themselves very like those living in the monasteries below, as fanatical, as self-absorbed, as avid for power or rather for the idleness which was, for them, the purpose of power.

The idleness to the pursuit of which the city—and the rich and powerful state, richer than Babylon in the Revelation and armed with nuclear missiles, that emulates, inspires, and sustains it—is dedicated is officially called *entertainment*. Here, even two-bit hookers may only advertise in the Yellow Pages as “entertainers,” which, the taxidriver explained, is not really that confusing after all, since you are probably looking up “escorts” under “E” anyway. He had a *Taxi Rider's Bill of Rights* posted in his cab, I noted, which included “Air Conditioning on Demand.” At the Venetian, *entertainment* was available on similar terms:

Bringing high art and culture to Las Vegas, the Venetian is proud to be home to not one, but TWO prestigious Guggenheim museums. The 63,700 sq. ft. Guggen-

heim Las Vegas, designed by Pritzker-prize winning architect Rem Koolhaas, debuted in October 2001. Also open is the 7,660 sq. ft. Guggenheim Hermitage Museum which combines rare works of art from both the Guggenheim and the State Hermitage Museum from St. Petersburg, Russia. The initial exhibit features 45 masterpieces from the Impressionist and Early Modern eras, some never before seen in the United States. Visitors can also take in headlining acts at the state-of-the-art, four-level Venetian Showroom.

“If the CIA can merge with the KGB,” Gusov murmured ruefully when I pointed to the press release, “I do not see why the Hermitage cannot merge with the Guggenheim.”

Indeed, why not? And, while you're at it, why not *recreate with painstaking exactness*, against the picturesquely lunar backdrop of the atomic testing ground that is the Nevada Desert, *the famous landmarks that make Venice the most beloved, romantic city in the world?* Let us be serious, lady and gentlemen! Did not the wise men who built Yale University, for instance, so reason, aiming to *recreate with painstaking exactness* what they supposed was the ageless Gothic of Euford and Eurbridge, and all the things that made them *the most beloved, romantic seats of higher learning on earth?* Did not the instigators of the American Revolution so reason, wishing to *recreate not one, but TWO great chapters of history, from the excitement and the high drama of Runnymede, with King John and the valiant band of barons that rise up against him in authentic period costume, to the great upheaval of the English Revolution and the prestigious ambience of Sir Oliver Cromwell?* And did not the CIA so reason, when it decided to merge with the KGB in all but name, *to recreate with painstaking exactness the democratic structures of a free country in totalitarian Russia, culminating in an award-winning, 63,700 sq. ft. political façade behind which any number of dirty deals could be done between us and them?*

Lady and gentlemen, I will go further than my gambling friend Gusov. This is not the beginning of the end. This is the end.

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Letter From France

by Michael McMahon

Out With the New



On March 12, I was kneeling at the back of the vast 11th-century abbey church of Fontgombault, France, where I formed exactly one third of the congregation at a mid-week, mid-Lent, mid-morning Mass. At the other end of the nave, the monastic community had processed in with identifiably Benedictine decorum, taken their places in the choir stalls, chanted the morning office of Terce, and begun the introit of the Mass of the day—the Mass and the day being those set down in the missal minimally reformed in 1965, before the liturgical revolution that followed the Second Vatican Council. Fontgombault is anomalous, but not unique: It is one of a small number of religious communities that have managed to remain fully within the Roman discipline while staying loyal to the immemorial liturgical traditions so shamelessly abandoned by Rome. God is worshiped at Fontgombault in Latin. On high days and holidays, the church is packed.

So the Mass had not begun with a “good morning,” the celebrant had not introduced himself by his Christian name, and the elderly woman who had arrived late and hovered behind me as I knelt at the very back of the building had not been exhorted to come on down to the front to “join in.” There had been no warm-up wisecracks, no comments about the weather, no instruction as to when to stand or sit, and no announcement listing the various pages the congregation would have to fumble through in order to follow whichever liturgical options might be in store. No. The Mass had simply begun. The monks had silently taken breath and sung the Introit; and their singing was as natural and easy as breathing itself. And it was beautiful. The voices of 60 men were as one, the sound they made ebbing and flowing, rising and falling, lifting to touch the ancient stone vaulting of the roof and dropping to roll round the massive pillars along the nave: “*Exaudi, Deus, orationem meam, et ne despexeris deprecationem meam: intende in me, et exaudi me.*”