

the front, so that we could “feel more a part of the service.” But there is no real escape in even the remotest corner of almost any Catholic church nowadays, for every ugly sound made in it is amplified and ubiquitized by the *sine qua non* of contemporary ecclesiastical furniture, the microphone. Thus, nobody in the congregation missed one *er* . . . or *ah* . . . of the celebrant’s stumbling impromptu preamble, all ears were battered equally by the poetry-blind bathos of the spit-provoking “responsorial psalm,” and each of the nine “happitudes” in the Gospel was hammered into every head in the congregation with a percussively un-blessed thud. The Mass was followed by a cremation. Taped piano arrangements of 1930’s band music tinkled from loudspeakers as the curtains closed over the coffin that contained the mortal remains of an old friend’s father. May he rest in peace.

That funeral was relentlessly, gratingly ugly; its texts, a crude, committee-created mishmash of clumsy mistranslations. Yet under its ill-fitting mask of outmoded modernity lay a sacramental reality. For all the poverty of their expression, its words expressed petitions that the Almighty take pity on an imperfect soul. No such request is made in the more elegant service composed by the pointedly Protestant Cranmer, who preached the predestination of the elect, and for whom “The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory” was “a fond thing vainly invented.” Behind the timeless beauty of his 16th-century English lie only the echoes and resonances of the words themselves. One could be forgiven for thinking that, in a world disintegrated by sin, beauty and truth have been sundered. But not everywhere. My last funeral used words that were, to my ears, far more beautiful than Cranmer’s, and its every outward sign reflected the graces it conveyed.

It was, of course, the traditional Roman Requiem Mass, which is still celebrated in some places as a consequence of the unshakable determination of a minority of Catholics. One of them was Mary Neilson, who had devoted the last 30 years of her life to the fight for the survival of the old Latin liturgy in Scotland. When she died last autumn, in her 90th year, she was buried, as her will requested, after a Solemn High Mass in the perfect little 15th-century church that had become the chapel of her old school, St. Leonard’s, in the ancient university city of St. Andrews. The celebrant was an

American, Fr. John Emerson, regional superior of the Society of St. Peter, the fraternity established, with papal approval, in 1988 to train priests in the traditional liturgy of the Roman Rite. The Society now operates all over the world and has 50 students studying at its seminary in Denton, Nebraska, and 70 more in Wigratzbad, Germany. The existence of such an officially sanctioned setup was unimaginable in the 1970’s, when just about the only authority exercised by the world’s weakened episcopate was directed at condemning anyone who said, attended, or even dared to ask for the Old Mass. England and Wales enjoyed an indult that allowed for the occasional celebration of a cut-down version of the traditional liturgy, but no such concession was granted to Scotland. There, as in so many places, the very worst kind of preconiliar clericalism was employed to impose the one remaining ecclesiastical orthodoxy: that Hell (if it should exist) would have to freeze over before a priest would ever again be allowed to say “*Introibo*” at the foot of the altar. Unbowed by such bullying, Mary organized a Scottish branch of the international Latin Mass society, *Una Voce*. She turned her Edinburgh house into a Mass center, served first by the priests of Archbishop Lefebvre’s Society of St. Pius X and then, after the Lefebvrist schism, by those of the Society of St. Peter—to which she left the property in her will.

Mary’s was thus a deservedly dignified funeral. The Mass was celebrated with an ease that fused gesture, sound, and place with time and timelessness. It was as things were, and as things ought to be. It was, mind, followed by an extended moment of high comedy in which the car carrying the priest who was to bury her got separated from the rest of the cortege in traffic and then followed the wrong hearse for some miles before it was flagged down and pointed in the right direction. There was laughter at Mary’s graveside, as well as sadness at her passing—but more than both, there was gratitude, for her efforts had done much to keep alive the ancient liturgy in Scotland during times when it would have been all too easy to have given up hope.

As the fruits of Mary’s efforts begin to grow, those of her opponents are rotting on the vine. A month after her funeral, the last rites were nearly said over the only Catholic seminary left in Scotland. With a handful of students occupying a building built for a hundred, the closure

of Scotus College in Glasgow was the recommended outcome of a review by Scotland’s Catholic hierarchy, but, when decision time came round last November, the bishops couldn’t bring themselves to make the choice that would mark the end of the self-renewal of Scottish Catholicism. It was a close-run thing: For months, the closure had been spoken of as a *fait accompli*. Glasgow’s Scotus has only 16 students; the handful in the Pontifical Scots College in Rome and the Royal Scots College in Salamanca, Spain, bring the national total to 37. Twenty years ago, there were 136; ten years ago, 79. In five years’ time, it is estimated that there will be only 25. Five years after that—well, draw the graph yourself. Cast into the postconciliar cauldron of uncertainty, the modernized priesthood in Scotland is evaporating as fast as it is everywhere else.

But the tide is on the turn. As the four-decade fad for “animators of eucharistic communities” fades to nothing, the timeless call to the sacrificial priesthood is being heard again. The few seminaries and monasteries in the world in which spirituality is built upon the traditional liturgy are overflowing with vocations. Hatred for the Catholic heritage is no longer fashionable. In April 2000, Bishop Mario Conti—a few months before being appointed archbishop of Glasgow and head of the Catholic Church in Scotland—celebrated the pre-Tridentine Sarum Rite of Mass to mark the 500th anniversary of King’s College Chapel, Aberdeen. Ten years ago, such an act would have been unthinkable.

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Letter From London

by Andrei Navrozov

What the Loser Wins



The reason I am loath ever to set foot in the casino of Venice is that, in mournful

contrast to just about everything else that fast moors me to her flooding shores, the Casinò di Venezia at Palazzo Vendramin is not an anachronism. The Italian state, which runs the place along with several other, still more pathetic establishments, such those at San Remo and Campione, sells gambling to the Italians as if it were Heinz beans, or football tickets, or airport novels. As in the United States, the hypocrisy of the state restricting the profitable activity to a few clip joints, like Atlantic City, induces in the player the nauseated sensation of being cornered by modernity. It is as though, instead of being parted from his money in the natural way, he is made to undergo the proverbial back-alley abortion.

In London, where almost everything that once kept me happy has now been uprooted and plowed under, casinos are among the last anachronisms going. Privately owned and codified in law as membership clubs, they range from the Chinese-populated, cigarette-burns-in-the-carpet, 50-people-to-a-table emporia such as the Victoria in Marble Arch to the inwardly tense, yet outwardly Olympian, temples to the divinity of chance such as the Clermont in Berkeley Square. The truth that all of them, high and low, with the blessed exception of the late John Aspinall's tabernacle in Curzon Street, are owned by casino chains, vast corporate bureaucracies with ties to Las Vegas, is not to be dwelled on, so long as their residually Edwardian-minded managers remain unanimous on the value of concealing it from the public. Thus, a stretch limousine will still carry the melancholy loser home through the blackness of Mayfair night from even the shabbiest of playgrounds, without his having to present a vehicle-request form in triplicate with two forms of personal identification to some bright-eyed vixen in an ill-fitting trouser suit of lime green.

Apart from the free ride, what is it that the loser wins? I have been pondering this question for the better part of a decade, with financial consequences that some of my friends here might describe as unwelcome. And it is becoming increasingly clear to me that I simply cannot *not* write about playing roulette in London, for exactly the same reasons that I cannot *not* write about the roast suckling pig with myrtle leaves that I had in Sardinia ten years ago, or the grace of the Syrian woman whom chance had placed on my right at a friend's dinner party in Beirut last week, or the voice of Laura

Giordano in Cimarosa's *Matrimonio Segreto*, here at the Barbican last April, even though Alfredo, the young soprano's own devoted father, ran off to Aspinalls with me in the interval. These too are anachronisms, after all—the ebbing life of an island village, the outnoded, harem femininity of an Eastern dancer, and the Europe just beginning to die of consumption in Cimarosa's duets, “among the most beautiful,” wrote Stendhal, “that the human spirit has ever conceived.”

But chief among these is the anachronism of individual liberty. And what the loser wins, I say to confound my tight-fisted critics, is his liberty, in particular his freedom from the dominion of universal reason—meaning science, accounting, insurance, actuarial tables, received wisdom, tin-pot democracy, and paper money. By wagering a part of his life that is in real time—by tradition, casinos do not allow clocks on the premises—he gains admittance to the realm of dreams that Shakespeare, having catalogued but a handful of the “thousand natural shocks” to which the flesh of a disinherited nobleman is heir, makes his Hamlet ponder.

I have always held that, in the epochal storm that has been gathering over our civilization since 1789, the wise man should think like a pessimist and live like an optimist. In social terms, this means seeing yourself as an impoverished nobleman while suffering others to see you as a rich bourgeois. In the casino, you are finally alone with your thoughts and your freedoms; and the percentage of your material losses, if there be losses, is but the peppercorn rent for the temporary accommodation of a lacerated and destitute dignity.

In ages long past, noblemen from Charlemagne to Tolstoy went to church—among other reasons—to feel mortal, ordinary, part of the human herd. In the epoch that began in Europe with the rise of the bourgeoisie under the banner of universal reason—and is now nearing its ineluctable denouement in universal slavery—noblemen went to the casino to feel noble, uncommon, above the herd. Not surprisingly, it was in the 18th century, when the authority of chance (that is, of birth) was first challenged by that of reason (that is, of money), that gambling in its modern form, and the game of roulette in particular, first arrived in France and England.

Before that, casinos had existed only in Venice, that autarchic microcosm where

the notion of a sovereign aristocracy had been under threat from the mercantile classes already by Shakespeare's day. “In sooth I know not why I am so sad,” Antonio sets the tone of that epoch in the opening line of *The Merchant of Venice*, presaging the all-becrushing melancholy to which the lone individual—who now begins to see himself as a dispossessed aristocrat of the spirit—has well and truly succumbed by the 19th century, as in Heine's famous “*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten, / Dass ich so traurig bin.*”

It is significant that gambling is not written about in the West today, any more than it was in Russia when Dostoevsky was first smitten by roulette at Bad Homburg and proceeded to reform his whole creative existence to accommodate the experience. In part, this is because of the fact that only in London do casinos still give the player the sense of having found a refuge from the sadness, and the conformity, and the plain risklessness of our common totalitarian era that, unbeknown to any of us, has long begun the countdown to spiritual zero. The gross, modern, and crooked casinos of Venice, Monte Carlo, or Las Vegas—collectively far better known throughout the world than their presumed London cousins—actually bear almost no relation to the anachronism I am trying to describe here as the source of the kind of liberating experience that Dostoevsky craved in his day.

The other, still more important cause of the silence that envelops gamblers and gambling is that the West's writers and journalists are themselves children of reason, bourgeois Sid Sawyers unable to perceive that without hunting, shooting, wenching, drinking, spitting, fighting, and cursing—in short, without some risk of actual harm to life, or limb, or at least reputation—their own bovinely revered literature would have had no 20th century, and not much of a 19th, either. Sure, a *New York Times* scribbler may go undercover to explore the secret world of massage parlors, while an Ivy League professor may sleep with as many coeds as there are in his English class, or else follow in the footsteps of Castaneda and gather dangerous herbs by moonlight on the town common. But where, I ask you, is the risk in that?

By contrast, a man embarking on the path of the casino gambler must be ready to become a liar, a thief, an embezzler, and a forger for the sake of his emancipating passion. Like Dostoevsky, he must be prepared to swindle his publisher to

have more ready cash to hand and to marry his stenographer so as not to have to give some of it to her. Like Herman in Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, he must feign passion without scruple when it is time to seduce a virgin. Like Julien Sorrel in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, he must be unmoved by death, especially his own. What professor of English, what New York hack, what American writer is nowadays prepared to regard such a vista with disinterest, to say nothing of sympathy?

We need only to recall how the Vietnam War protester Norman Mailer whined in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Armies of the Night* that the canned orange juice he had been given in jail for breakfast burned his throat. For the trouble with such notable exponents of the cultural mainstream of the West, and of the United States in particular, is not—as their right-wing detractors often claim—their moral depravity and subversive daring but their absolute cowardice and cushy conformism. The unfortunate Theodore Kaczynski, whose *Industrial Society and Its Future* was the only attempt at original thinking ever permitted in the feature pages of the *New York Times*, has more writer in him—more bomber, more gambler, and certainly more nobleman—than all the departments of literature in America.

God, look at the time. I must dress for Aspenalls.

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Letter From Finland

by Alberto Carosa

The Prosciutto War



The mid-December 2001 E.U. summit in Laeken, Belgium, will probably be remembered most for its “prosciutto war,” which began when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi refused to approve the new food agency to be located in Helsinki, Finland, since he was convinced that the Italian city of Parma was best suited to house the E.U. office. According to the major Finnish daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*, Berlusconi raised his voice,

shouting his dissent, arguing that the Finns did not even know what prosciutto (ham) was.

Sharp statements such as this could backfire; in fact, the Finns *do* know what prosciutto is, so much so that they even have a particular word to indicate a special seasonal ham: *Joulukinkku* (literally “ham,” *Kinkku*, “for Christmas,” *Joulu*). Berlusconi insisted that such an agency should not be located “in a country which is probably very proud of its marinated reindeer or Baltic fish with polenta, but certainly can’t compete with Parma, the symbol of good cuisine.”

While nobody can dispute the richness and variety of the cooking traditions of Parma, the fact remains that a reindeer-based dish is common in Finland, though you would hardly find reindeer with polenta (corn pudding), since corn is not grown at such high latitudes and, therefore, is alien (though not unknown) to Finnish culture. In fact, the Finns could teach the Italians a thing or two about cuisine. For example, the Savo region in central Finland offers a fairly simple but rather tasty dish called *kalakukko* (from *kala*, “fish,” and *kukko*, “cock”), which is a loaf of preferably homemade dark bread, filled with small fish and some bacon, and baked. When it is done, the bread is sliced and eaten, topped with butter. Or, if you want to enjoy a unique and delicious drink, find a machine called a *mehu-Majia* (from *mehu*, “juice,” and *Majia*, a woman’s name), which is a large double-boiler containing several kilos of fruit or berries that are liquefied by the steam from the boiling water below, producing a highly concentrated juice that can be diluted in water for a tasty soft drink.

Finnish lessons could extend to other areas. Whereas Italy has worked diligently for many years to marginalize Latin, Cicero’s language is increasingly popular in Finland, where you can even find a radio broadcast in Latin. Until recently, if you wanted to study medicine, Latin was a compulsory subject. Moreover, according to a Reuters report (December 4, 2001), Finnish students scored the highest in an OECD study that measured the performance of 15-year-olds in reading, math, and science. Though Catholics are but a small minority and no Latin Mass is officially celebrated, the Finnish branch of *Una Voce* (dedicated to the worldwide promotion of the old Roman Catholic rite in Latin) is one of the fastest growing in the world. (Finnish *Una Voce*

president Anneli Hokkanen was recently interviewed at length in the *Helsingin Sanomat*.)

And last, but not least, in late June, Ansa reported from Paris that the Berlin-based Transparency International, an anticorruption organization, gave Finland a top rating on its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (9.9 points out of 10), while Italy, though she had made some progress, was still 29th out of 91 nations surveyed, with a rating of 5.5.

Berlusconi’s reaction might have been less emotional and better received had he questioned the very idea of Finns checking Italian food (and *vice versa*) or challenged the notion of one single authority over all E.U. food, in the same way that he has resisted the E.U. single arrest-warrant drive. On this score, Berlusconi is by no means alone. I was in Brussels during the Laeken Summit to cover “The Future of Europe—Democracy in Danger,” a counterconference in the E.U. Parliament organized by the SOS Democracy group and chaired by Danish MEP Jens Peter Bonde of the group Europe of Democracies and Diversities. There, MEPs of the most varied persuasions, representatives of E.U.-critical NGOs, and the leaders of other organizations from around Europe voiced their intention to oppose the proposed arrest warrant. As a result, a group of MEPs, including leftist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, collected enough signatures from among their colleagues to postpone the vote on the warrants. “Because this is a vital matter to all Europeans,” they contended, “we need to prepare the case properly in the committee and not just rush things through.”

Of course, Cohn-Bendit may have a personal interest in opposing an E.U.-wide arrest warrant, since it may apply retroactively. As readers of *Chronicles* know (see “Italy’s Child-Abuse Lobby,” *Vital Signs*, September 2002), Cohn-Bendit has been the focus of heavy scrutiny since releasing a book about the “erotic nature of his contacts with children at an alternative kindergarten in Frankfurt.” Prosciutto and pedophilia make strange bedfellows—anywhere but in the European Union.

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