

Entrance to the Forest at Barbizon in Winter

— 1866-67 —

after the painting by J.-F. Millet (1814-75)

by David Middleton

No springtime cows, heavy with milk or young,
Now pass the ancient gate to graze on grass
Beyond this wall of beeches dense and deep
Where birds peck up the snowflake-crusted seeds.

One stone gatepost remains, the other gone
Or crumbled into rubble in the drift
Where siftings upon siftings blow through trees,
Old matter's ghostly soul that roams the earth.

The beeches' topmost boughs branch up in V's
Outreaching to embrace down-gliding birds
Whose V-winged shapes alight on kindred limbs
Above the forest's darkened common ground.

The trees speak in a language all their own
Known only to interpreters, the birds,
Who leave their runic footprints in the snow
Before tall beeches standing there like runes.

by Paul Gottfried

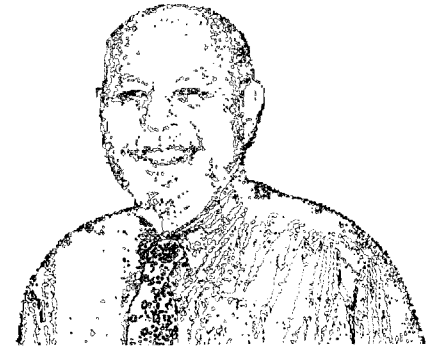
Le Monde, the Flesh, and the Devil

A *livre à scandale* in France this year is a heavily documented work by two veteran freelancers, writer-researcher Pierre Péan and Philippe Cohen, editor of the French satirical publication *Marianne*. *La face cachée du Monde*, which runs over 600 pages, was put out by the very independent press Mille et Une Nuit, over threats of legal action coming from the troika that now heads the newspaper *Le Monde*, General Director Jean-Marie Colombani and his associates, Edwy Plenel, a prominent Trotskyist, and neoliberal Alain Minc. Péan and Cohen provide a detailed picture of the corruption and intimidation that plague *Le Monde*, which boasts the second-largest subscriber base in France and the greatest sales and prestige abroad. Despite its usually predictably leftist positions, the newspaper has allegedly cooperated with the CIA, in return for favors, to destabilize Franco-Russian relations; has defended shaky corporations (e.g., Enron) in which it had invested; and has engaged in continuing assaults on former Socialist President François Mitterand. It began to flail away at Mitterand after he removed from an executive post Plenel's plant in the national police force, the highly bribeable secretary general of the FASP (fédération autonome des syndicats de police), Bernard Deleplace. Péan and Cohen list some of the political and literary celebrities whom the newspaper has gone after for transparently petty reasons, and the presses and publications that work hand-in-glove with *Le Monde's* directors. Manuscripts are received at Robert Laffont and Gallimard in accordance with the wishes of *Le Monde's* editorial staff, and the most influential French book-review magazine, *Livres Hebdomadaires*, has become Plenel's personal preserve. (His wife and publisher hold high positions there.) Meanwhile, other magazines—for example, *Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Point*, and *Libération*—routinely second *Le Monde's* judgments concerning literary personalities or who is or is not in sync with “human rights” as prescribed by France’s “newspaper of reference.” Significantly, Soviet acts of brutality were never subject to the paper’s human-rights litmus test, while the morally ambiguous situation in Kosovo brought forth torrents

of invective against “Serbian genocide.” Contributors and editorialists went ballistic attacking “the ideological crimes” and residual “Petainist sentiments” of Régis Debray and Angelo Rinaldo, two journalists who disputed the account of events cited to justify NATO’s intervention against Serbia.

The most worrisome thing about this imperial newspaper, however, goes beyond its abuse of power. *Marianne* is correct to observe that, “to have access to the columns of *Le Monde*, when one writes a political book, there is one infallible recipe: one has to be or aspire to be a Trotskyist.” Beyond Plenel’s start as a Trotskyist operative and editor, the editorial director has promoted leftist internationalism and ritualistic “antifascism.” For example, Plenel pulled the strings behind the mealy-mouthed “*Appel à la vigilance*,” which *Le Monde* brought out in 1993 over the signatures of leading French intellectuals. This document warned against the spread of “identitarian” trends and stressed the need to “take appropriate action against the impending danger.” Its call was explicitly intended to criminalize the work of Alain de Benoist and of others who might drift into the “general environment” of presumed nationalist xenophobes. As one spirited nonconformist, Elisabeth Lévy, shows in *Les maîtres-censeurs* (2002), such statements, which Plenel threw together with Didier Daeninckx, betray a Trotskyist aspect, associating fascism with European nationalism and bourgeois institutions and calling for the liquidation of anything that stands in the way of a permanent cultural revolution.

There are two aspects that define this new Trotskyism, beyond the abolition of European national pasts and middle-class decencies. One is a tiresome *politique commémorative*, which recalls the evils of French fascism and the Vichy regime, blots on the national character for which the French, no matter what they do, are accused of having never inwardly atoned. This selective invocation of national history works as a club with which to beat one’s opposition senseless by continually saddling them with real and imaginary Petainist evils. As Alain Besançon notes: “We are now beyond considering the [national]



past with admiration and praise. In their place now reign indignation and hate.”

This is particularly the fate of past writers or artists who did not reflect or prefigure the progressive tendencies now being imposed. In 2000, *Le Monde* committed character assassination against the 19th-century composer Hector Berlioz, whose romantic sensibility was seen as preparing the way for antisemitic fascism. No substantive evidence was produced for this wooden language, except that Berlioz’s opera *Les Troyens* draws on the “nationalist” poetry of Vergil. By now, the p.c. edicts of the French press are more arbitrary by far than the tastes enforced in Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia.

The second trait of the Trotskyized *Le Monde* and its fellow travelers is hateful, scatological language directed against those who are not sufficiently sensitized. This form of discourse is often accompanied by implied calls for violence to be inflicted on celebrities of the right, particularly Jean-Marie Le Pen.

In an enlightening dossier on the Trotskyist “tolerance” practiced by *Le Monde* and its contributors, *éléments* (April 2003) quotes at length from the newspaper to underline the contradiction that “tolerance admits of no exceptions” but does not cover “criminal opinions” expressing reactionary sentiments. Thus, on May 25, 2000, 26 intellectuals, including Jacques Derrida, Philippe Sollers, and Claude Lanzmann, most of whom should be known from the “*Appel à la Vigilance*,” demanded in *Le Monde* the “criminalization” of the views of Renaud Camus, an author they had obviously ceased to appreciate. Since the French left has created the legal means for such criminalization—the Loi Gayssot, passed in 1992 and enjoying the full endorsement of *Le Monde*—the signatories could pursue their totalitarian dreams in earnest. c