

out quietness and without clean, fresh air. I wonder, too, how they can stand the pressure of anonymous humanity. I know people as individual human beings. I don't like the bitter faces and the sharp elbows of the subway.

To Grafton, perhaps Granville Hicks was annoyingly voluble, too articulate by half, resented for his extensive book learning (if privately disparaged for a "lack of common sense"), but, as is said of abrasive or unpopular citizens who sit on boards and organize meetings in all the Graftons of America, he did a lot for the town.

Now and then, Granville Hicks, having jettisoned the juvenile certitude of the ideologue, seems to throw up his hands: "I do not know what should be done to save [Grafton], much less the world." Oh no, Hicks, you knew. Man, you lived it.

Bill Kauffman's latest book is Dispatches From the Muckdog Gazette: A Mostly Affectionate Account of a Small Town's Fight to Survive (Henry Holt/Picador).

Counterrevolutionary Light

by Paul Gottfried

**Critics of the Enlightenment:
Readings in the French
Counter-Revolutionary Tradition**
edited by Christopher Olaf Blum
Wilmington: ISI Books;
409 pp., \$18.00



Both ISI and Christopher Olaf Blum, who edited this anthology, deserve our thanks for making available in English the six 19th-century French conservative thinkers whose writings are herein presented. Although these men—François René de Chateaubriand, Louis de Bonald, Joseph de Maistre, Frédéric Le Play, Émile Keller, and René de La Tour du Pin—do not display an equal degree of analytic depth, each should be read for what he had to say about a changing European society that would eventually move toward sexual equality, a centralized administrative state, and consumer capitalism. In *The Sociological Tradition* and *The Social Group in French Thought*,

Robert Nisbet acknowledges the debt of modern social theorists, including Karl Marx, to those who have been labeled "counterrevolutionaries"—in particular, Maistre, Bonald, La Tour de Pin, and Le Play. Without their essentially Aristotelian emphasis on the social bond and their defense of the inequality rooted in the family and community as natural to the human condition, it would be impossible to understand how real—as opposed to constructivist—societies function. The French protosociologists, in their critical rejection of the Enlightenment, made possible an accurate examination of the preconditions for social life. The chatter manufactured by intellectuals about "human rights" did not faze such traditionalists. Rights, for them, came out of specific traditions and tested social arrangements. At the same time, however, these thinkers considered moral authority to be anchored in the Catholic Church, which they viewed as a source of social order and theological truth.

In his introductory essay, Blum attempts to distinguish what is still relevant about his subjects from what he finds deficient or archaic. Although such an exercise may strike some readers as presumptuous, it may also be necessary to permit a long-dead figure to cast his light on the present age. One draws lessons from Aristotle or from Hobbes not primarily to reconstruct a fourth-century-B.C. *polis* or a 17th-century European sovereign state but to understand human nature and structures of authority. While these writers' frame of reference may be focused on their own time, what makes them great is their ability to transcend their age by addressing problems that belong to the human condition. What makes classical conservatives worth studying is their capacity to grasp human weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the context of upholding social authority. Their concern with Original Sin may have less to do with Catholic orthodoxy or Augustinian theology than with their empirical observations about the collapse of long-established authorities. And pointing to revolutionary France or incipient urban capitalism may be less effective as illustrations than what can be found in the urban sewers and alternative lifestyles of late modernity. On such varied subjects as Jacobin politics, intermediate institutions (the defense of which caused the French aristocrat La Tour de Pin to call for a "corporate regime"), and sexu-

al equality, the critical thought of Blum's subjects seem as relevant today as when it was first penned.

Where Blum goes astray is in moralizing (in his Foreword) about the need for a middle ground between his subjects' "complete rejection of the modern world" and the impulse to "reject all of counterrevolutionary thought." We are supposed to embrace simultaneously "what is good in modernity and what is good in counterrevolutionary thought"; "the rejection of unconditional traditionalism and radical constructivism"; "adherence to modern liberty" but reservations about "indeterminate liberty"; "the rejection of the sovereignty of the individual" together with the denial that "human communities have the right to be oppressive." How this "conservative liberalism," once put into practice, would operate is not made clear, though two observations may be in order. We live with the historical hand that we are dealt. No matter which conservative and modern ideas we include in our personalized value-package, we do not act as autonomous individuals. We belong to historical processes that will not likely be changed by our efforts to mix Maistre with John Stuart Mill, or Bonald with "compassionate conservatism." Indeed, this mixing that Blum prescribes is characteristic of what used to pass for American "conservatism," before the neoconservatives closed down the show by imposing democratic centralism. We are placed before an ideological smorgasbord, into which individuals in search of "values" can dig their imaginations. A perception I owe to Tom Fleming is that the postwar conservative movement has been, for the most part, an unconservative enterprise that appeals to posturing individuals. These postwar American "conservatives" could not persuasively defend, even if they wanted to, an ordered society: Not only did they arrive too late, but, assuming that they got what they thought they wanted, they might be horrified by the result.

Note that I am not claiming that classical conservatism, and its unqualified hatred of the French Revolution, is the only sound political tradition. Bourgeois liberalism seems equally worthy of defense. What I am trying to explain is why American conservatism has come to such a pass that Jonah Goldberg, writing in *National Review*, can tell us, with a straight face, that Maistre was a leftist because, unlike American conservatives, he did not believe in human rights. Such a misunder-

standing can only have occurred because our misnamed “conservative movement” has not, for decades, had much to do with conservatism. It has not defended, except indirectly or as an individual choice, the kind of authoritarian, sexist, and kin-based society that European traditionalists had associated with a sound communal life.

What the counterrevolutionaries teach better than most other critics is the process into which we have been thrust. Their attacks on rationalism in politics, the legitimating of equality between the sexes, and democratic centralism were prescient, even if the solutions they offered were either impractical or worked badly. While Blum complains about the “moral defects” of the Franco regime’s attempt to apply Catholic counterrevolutionary principles, the real question is whether such principles have any further utility. General Franco did bring several decades of peace to his country; he also, however, helped lead it toward the yuppie, socialist, postbourgeois society that it became after his death in 1973. Perhaps he had no choice—but that, too, proves my point. Blum’s subjects can show us about how we got to where we are. They cannot, however, assist us in bringing back lost powers and dominations.

Paul Gottfried is the author, most recently, of Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt (University of Missouri Press).

Sunset in the Head

by Catharine Savage Brosman

The Work of the Sun: New and Selected Poems, 1991-2002

by Charles Edward Eaton
Cranbury, NJ: Cornwall Books;
304 pp., \$25.00



Proust wrote, in *Time Regained*, that “Style is a question not of technique, but of vision.” Technique may be said to inform and undergird the style, but the artistic vision has priority: It is the style. In Charles Edward Eaton’s recent collection, his 17th, comprising new verse (some published previously in *Chronicles*) and a generous selection of poems from earlier volumes that appeared

between 1991 and 2002, a controlling artistic vision is everywhere. Immediate topics, or pretexts for the poems, vary greatly, but the vantage point on experience, or style of mind, is identifiable throughout, conveyed by a mature voice using a range of suitable tones, or hues, of expression. The collection adds impressively to Eaton’s distinguished achievement as an American (and Southern) poet and prose writer, in a career stretching over more than six decades.

Eaton’s early writing was shaped by his studies at Harvard with Robert Frost. A 1955 collection attracted praise from William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and Robert Lowell. James Merrill wrote to the author:

With the death of Stevens it seemed that no one would ever again command that vital intersection of thought and sensuous beauty, but you are there, with your own rhythms, and the effect is spellbinding.

Others have connected Eaton’s writing to the Metaphysicals—Donne and Herbert.

Mention of such names remains apt, particularly that of Wallace Stevens. Eaton’s most characteristic form in this collection (additional forms include quatrains and eight-line stanzas) is the three-line stanza that Stevens used in “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” and countless other poems, short and long. With no fixed measure or fixed line length—Eaton’s lines tend to be long, sometimes wrapping over—the form is very flexible, allowing for chatty diction and extended probings; yet the condensed stanza shapes, or reveals the shape of, the poet’s reflections or musings. He prefers end-stop lines and often adds rhyme (lines one and three of each stanza rhyming), another way of holding the verses together. Space between the stanzas affords a kind of diastolic moment to the poetic systolic pressure of the compact tercets.

So what is the poetic vision of *The Work of the Sun*? It is marked by imagery in both senses, mental (usually visual) and rhetorical, but is not that of an Imagist, since Eaton is not loath to go beyond his figures to their implications, which, in his world, are everywhere and multidimensional. He wants, as he says, “a thing to be itself and yet come at me like a sunburst” (from “The Swan at Sunset,” a beautiful poem). One of the most

striking veins of the collection is fantasy and whimsy, reminiscent of Stevens’ in, for instance, “The Emperor of Ice Cream.” Sometimes this whimsy is wistful—one thinks of Verlaine (Eaton mentions him in the title poem, and Harlequin and Pierrot appear)—elsewhere cruel, as in Laforgue, or cubist or surrealist, with oneiric perceptions (opened shells reveal ears instead of oysters) and strange juxtapositions, as in the poetry of Apollinaire and Eluard. Another vein is painterly—tableaux or delicate watercolors in which Eaton’s preferred palette of summer colors, blue, gold, and rose, predominates, though a discordant red, often in the form of blood, may be interjected. Sensuousness, even sensuality, constitute a third vein, conveyed often by the first two, with the full range of the senses utilized. Through these strains runs irony, occasionally personal (an older man looking at himself critically), more often general. Reaching out tentatively with a surmise or a question, drawing back, half-serious, half-teasing, making verbal pirouettes around the subject, Eaton plays in his various registers to make subtle connections between experience and world. Often one small conceit supports, like a pivot or pedestal, a broad or high-flying insight: “I pick a straw as if it sipped my life” (“Last Straw”).

The connections critics have identified between Eaton and the English Metaphysicals are thus justified. He sees, as did they, “How incurably physical we are, /and how incorrigibly of the mind” (“The Cane”). The world and the human observer are nearly one: Eaton speaks of “our inner sea” (“The Junk”), notes that “somehow sea and summer match the heart” (“The Vise”), and asks, “Was the sun at last, in fact the sunset in his head?” (“Asbestos Book”). Almost anything can be a pretext for a poem, or, if one prefers, *be* a poem—tweezers, zippers, a goblet, a mandolin propped up with a nude. Sometimes the analogue—conceit or metaphor—reveals its subject and meaning explicitly, as in “Roof Garden”:

How did we think of planting gardens on a roof,
The ornamental trees, the glittering fountain and the flowerbeds,
As though of our ascent from some superior somewhere we gave living proof.

Elsewhere, the distance between analogue and subject may be considerable