historical figures studied here, illustrate two important lessons to be learned from this upheaval. First, men will always be drawn to war, which offers adventure and escape, the solidarity of comradeship and collective endeavor, heightened experience, and the freedom to destroy. Second, the survival of civilization depends on the secure and lasting recovery of the 19th-century code of European chivalry, which imposed limits upon war, governing both personal and collective conduct. Given the allure of war, and mankind's constant temptation to violence, Pfaff views the loss of this code as nothing less than catastrophic.

Lawrence and Junger remained loyal to the earlier tradition; neither approved of what rose in its place. Lawrence opposed his government's policy to extend imperial control over the Arabs, and Junger, while initially supportive of National Socialism, turned against Hitler when he saw what he was doing to Germany, the Jews, and Europe. The rest of Pfaff's subjects, however, reveled in the postwar disillusion and disorder and embraced various forms of violent political romanticism, based on "the most influential myth of modern Western political society": that of "the total and redemptive transformation of human society through political means," which now included totalitarian dictatorship and total war. Pfaff believes faith in utopian war was the most "disruptive force in international politics from 1918 to 1989," adding ominously that that faith "has reappeared today in official and unofficial circles." He is referring, of course, to the neoconservative Bush administration.

Pfaff believes that the sole great state to have survived the cataclysms of the century is now a global military hegemon driven by the same kind of utopian expectations and the same faith in redemptive violence that characterized earlier historical disruptions. He is openly contemptuous of Francis Fukuyama's thesis that history is reaching its end with the universalization of American democratic capitalism. Pfaff regards Trotsky and Che Guevara as the founding fathers of neoconservatism. Guevara naively believed that the Cuban revolution could be replicated in other Latin countries. When he tried to instigate revolution in Bolivia, he was shot. He failed to realize that successful revolutions are the products of "indigenous forces" and cannot be orchestrated or imposed from outside. "The American project to deliver democracy to the 'greater Middle East' through politico-military intervention" is "founded on the identical fallacy."

"Modern governments," Pfaff argues, "led by the United States, increasingly act within the dimensions of a virtual reality their own propaganda has created," (following the pattern established by Munzenberg's Comintern), with the result that ideological constructs and meaningless abstractions "acquire a power over political imagination and discourse, and official decisions," that is almost absolute. President Bush has repeatedly insisted that the United States battles evil itself in the global "War on Terror." He has relentlessly dehumanized Palestinian resistance fighters, Iraqi insurgents, and Saudi hard-liners as nameless "terrorists" who have no other motivation than hatred of freedom, opposition to democracy, and jealousy of the United States. In such eschatological warfare, "You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists," in the words of the President. For Pfaff, such apocalyptic rhetoric evidences the descent of "American political thought toward the darkness of totalitarian conceptions and discourse, translating human conflict into metaphysical combat." "[R]eal American conservatives," he observes, are opposed to this kind of ideological warfare and among those "most anxious about the country's future."

Pfaff prefers an "anti-utopian tradition of thought" that accepts the "permanent realities of politics and history" and teaches us to "look for solutions . . . within experienced reality rather than [in] imagination about the future." This tradition, he believes, can be traced to the Old Testament, as well as to Aristotle, and it finds modern champions in Milton, Tocqueville, Burke, Burckhardt, Acton, Niebuhr, Aron, Arendt, and Kennan, all of whom believed that art is more important to human civilization than politics and that the true test of a nation is not her military or economic power but her cultural achievements, her quality of life, and the ethical behavior of her people. These thinkers hold to a tragic, rather than an heroic or eschatological, view of history and to a realistic view of man's predicament in a world in which evil is ineradicable; suffering and injustice, inescapable; and continuity, rather than progress, the story of man's moral state.

Pfaff's concluding lesson, that violence should be rejected as a means of social and political change, is so amply supported by argument and example as to seem unanswerable. Those who have sought to remove evil, suffering, and injustice from the world by means of war and revolution have only added to the sum of its villainy. As American artillery, tanks, and aircraft bombard the cities of Iraq, we do well to remember that "to sacrifice living human beings to make 'a better world' is an act of totalitarian morality and is also futile. There is no collective solution to the human condition." Our most important duty, as Aristotle taught and Pfaff believes, is rather to cultivate virtue and all forms of excellence within ourselves.

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Playing Poetry With a Net

by Mark Royden Winchell

The Muscled Truce
by Catharine Savage Brosman
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press; 64 pp., $22.95

◆

In the Introduction to his classic anthology of Fugitive verse, William Pratt writes: "Modern American poetry abounds in individualism, but two groups of poets have affected its course profoundly." He is referring, of course, to the Imagists and the Fugitives. Nearly a century after the Imagists first gathered in London in 1909, I wonder what current movements in poetry will seem to have been decisive to a critic writing 100 years from now. I suspect that the rediscovery of formal verse by American poets at the end of the 20th century will rank high on the list. As poet-critic David Middleton has pointed out, "for well over three thousand years—from before Homer until the end of the nineteenth century—almost all poets in the western tradition composed in measured verse." In the long view, the free-verse revolution of the 20th century may prove more an aberration than a permanent development. If this is true, then Catharine Savage Brosman's poetry is likely to stand

the test of time.

It may be that poetry is neither an expression of emotion, as Wordsworth thought, nor an escape from emotion, as Eliot would have it, but a channeling of emotion. To accomplish that task, all the resources of language must be available. For this reason, the term "expansive" poetry is surely more accurate than the constricted designation "Neoformalist." In her most recent volume of verse, *The Muscled Truce*, Brosman wears a variety of masks and speaks in a range of voices unavailable to those who equate poetry with personal therapy.

The first section of 13 poems ("A Distant Shore") is a series of monologues spoken by a spectrum of mythological, historical, and imaginary characters—including King Minos, Lord Byron, the Nazi-turned-Ally Ernst Hanfstaengl, and a prisoner of war from Vietnam. Although these poems are written in formal verse, Brosman uses such devices as enjambment and caesura to make her lines sound conversational without being in the least bit prosaic. Like Robert Frost, Brosman knows that the human voice has a rhythm independent of meaning. (On occasion, as in "King Minos Speaks," the effect is similar to that of a modern "imitation" of classical verse.) Moreover, Brosman's narrative power is such that she can repeatedly create dramatic tension in a poem running fewer than two pages.

Far from seeing art as invariably redemptive, Brosman realizes that artistic creation is a devil's pact bred from suffering. (As an epigraph for her entire volume, she has selected Camus' observation that "there is no love of life without despair of life.") In one particularly haunting poem, "Up Island," she writes of a man who subjects his family to prolonged abuse when his wife refuses to give him a divorce to marry a more recent love. The tale is told by the man's adult daughter—a painter. She concludes by writing:

> . . . Neuroses are a gift; they've let
> me paint. I'm going to do the river next,
> unleashed along its stony bed, the way
> my mother wept. One day I'll paint the moors,
> the bracken thick and wet, the heather dark,
> a lonely woman moaning to the wind.

In the second section of the book, "A Muscled Truce," Brosman abandons personae to write from an observational perspective about a gallery of individuals who use a particular vocation or hobby to define their approach to life. (I am reminded of John Crowe Ransom's discussion of "work forms" and "play forms" in his seminal essay "Forms and Citizens.") Also gone is the conversational voice, replaced by an elegant but functional iambic tetrameter. Although the beat and the rhyme call attention to themselves, the form is made flexible by the syntax of each poem. You can hear the naturalness of the *spoken sentence*.

Although none of the speakers is identified as a poet, "The Swimmer" gives us a trope for poetry in the phrase that also serves as the volume's title: "He finishes his laps; / his limbs are free and loose— / to move the world, perhaps, / by such a muscled truce." Like the swimmer, the poet moves through a fluid element—one that embodies the Hereclitian paradox of fixity and flux. Although intuitive logic would dictate that one go under, it is possible not only to stay afloat but to glide forward through the proper balance of energy and grace. To do so is finally a life-sustaining act, as the alternative is to sink beneath the watery floor.

In the third and final section of the book, we hear what sounds like the voice of the poet herself. Whether or not these poems are literally autobiographical, the speaker is not obviously someone other than Brosman. In a sense, the use of personae in the first section and third-person observation in the second earns Brosman the privilege of personal reflection in what she calls "A Cosmic Comedy." As befits the allusion to Dante, religion plays a key role in this part of the volume. In "Painting, Anonymous, circa 1700," Brosman follows the example of Auden and makes a classic painting the text for her poem. After describing a flawlessly executed rendering of the Crucifixion, she writes:

> . . . The painter's eye
> has failed him, though, perhaps from guilt or awe:
> the sacred face is blurred, the cloth awry—
>
> as if, a spectator himself, he stood
> in tears and helpless in the crowd that poured
> their imprecations on the holy rood
> and on the broken body of the Lord.

In effect, the artist becomes a hypothetical spectator, whose very impotence makes him a surrogate for us all.

An even more striking vision can be found in the longest poem in the volume, "In the Virgin Islands." In the third of four sections, the speaker comes across the gardener who works for the woman she is visiting. At first, she takes this unkempt figure for John the Baptist. But then she remembers the morning of the Resurrection, when Mary Magdalene,

> distraught, supposed she saw the gardener,
> a simple man of no pretensions, standing there alone;
> and then she recognized her friend, and ran
> to tell the others, who assumed that she was mad
> with grief—announcing Eden reconciled
> and green, the perishable body radiant, the earth reborn.

What is initially taken for mistaken identity reveals a more profound resemblance that is at the very heart of the Gospel.

Whatever good the modernist aberration may have accomplished, it drove away the popular audience for poetry. Far too often, serious artistic purpose became synonymous with obscurity of meaning and an assault on conventional meter. While this may have been a necessary reaction against the bombast and sentimentality of high Victorian verse, the early modernists eventually turned poetry into a coterie art, not unlike opera and ballet. Fortunately, the expansionist poets of our own era are proving once again that verse need not patronize us to be understood nor titillate us to be enjoyed. Robert Frost once compared writing free verse to playing tennis without a net. Not only does Catharine Savage Brosman play *with* a net: Her serves and volleys are a wonder to behold.

Mark Royden Winchell's next book, Reinventing the South: Essays on the Literary Imagination, *will by published by the University of Missouri Press later this year.*

Room to Pass

by Patrick J. Walsh

Longfellow—A Rediscovered Life
by Charles H. Calhoun
New York: Beacon Press;
317 pp., $27.50

◆

Few people read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) much anymore. Lines from his poems were once on the tips of tongues the world over. Students used to memorize "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," and lines from "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha." Longfellow's once-great literary reputation rivaled that of Tennyson and Dickens, and, after his death, the American poet was singularly honored by having his bust placed in Westminster Abbey with the greatest English poets. When Longfellow is mentioned at all today, however, he is held up to ridicule by modern academics and dismissed. His gentle Christian nature would have accepted his waning reputation tranquilly. Perhaps he would even quote from one of his poems: "The tide rises and the tide falls / The twilight darkens, the curlew calls."

Charles Calhoun's new biography, which is both overdue and welcome, would rescue Longfellow from the surrounding darkness. The book's cover sports a handsome portrait of the poet at 33 years of age. Longfellow is generally pictured as an old man with flowing white beard. But he, too, had his youth and, when young, was a bit of a dandy. A clever student at Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club wrote of the Smith Professor of French and Spanish:

> Just twig the Professor dressed out
> in his best
> Yellow kids and buff gaiters, green
> breeches, blue vest;
> With hat on one whisker and an air
> that says go it
> Look here the great North American poet.

A staff member on the Maine Humanities Council, Calhoun is a skilled biographer who has written a book that is a pleasure to read. His comments on Longfellow's poetry are sensible and persuasive, righting a great wrong in American literary history.

Born in Maine on February 27, 1807 (when that state was still part of Massachusetts), Longfellow led an interesting life. His father, a prominent lawyer, sent young Henry to Bowdoin College, where he graduated along with Nathaniel Hawthorne. Longfellow then left America for three years to study language in Europe. An accomplished linguist, he once had to produce an American passport to prove that he was not a native Italian. Always, he retained a sunny Mediterranean disposition. Upon his return to the United States, he taught modern languages at Bowdoin. Six years later, he again set out for Europe, returned a widower after his first wife perished from a miscarriage in Rotterdam, and took up a professorship at Harvard. But Longfellow was eager to retire from teaching to devote himself to poetry. He married Fanny Appleton and purchased a house in Cambridge that had once served as George Washington's headquarters. Here, the founding father of American poetry produced his great works.

Longfellow's sonnets are among the finest in the English language. Those dedicated to Dante come from his beautiful translation of the *Divine Comedy* and are tinged with the sadness Longfellow felt over the frightful fate of his beloved Fanny, who burned to death in 1861. (Calhoun has uncovered new information suggesting that Fanny's skirts caught fire after being set alight by one of the children, who was playing with matches.) Longfellow, in attempting to put out the fire, was so badly burned that he grew a beard to cover the facial scars.

Calhoun seems a bit tentative defending Longfellow. He need not be. Philip Larkin took the academic critics and their domiciled poets head on, charging that "They produce a new kind of bad poetry, not the old kind that tries to move the reader, but one that does not even try." It came about because of a "cunning merger between the modern poet, literary critic and academic." This modern monopoly manufactures products Longfellow would not recognize as poetry: unrhymed lines centered on a page with no sonorous sounds or resounding insights leading to the eternal.

Unlike his contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson, Longfellow remained a faithful Christian who was strongly drawn to the Roman Catholic Church. I suspect that this is another reason he has not found favor with modern critics, who have no faith and are antithetical to things spiritual and supernatural: They inhabit a closed gnostic realm inside their own skulls. Such dry bones can harm no one. The great masters like Longfellow wrote of things eternal, and for poets yet to be born.

Longfellow believed in a communion of poets, as well as a Communion of Saints, who beckon us beyond the worldly gloom of sin and death. From an early age, he was fascinated by Dante. Longfellow's influence led to Dante Studies being established at Harvard, and it was there that T.S. Eliot that became strongly influenced by the Florentine poet. And it was Dante who led Eliot out of the spiritual wasteland of modernity.

Patrick J. Walsh writes from Quincy, Massachusetts.

LIBERAL ARTS

SIMPLE SENTENCES

"The Post: Why do you think [Osama] bin Laden has not been caught?

"THE PRESIDENT: Because he's hiding.

"The Post: Our allies have done all they can do to help catch him?

"THE PRESIDENT: We're on the hunt.

"The Post: Do you think others are on the hunt, too? Are you happy, content with what other countries are doing in that hunt?

"THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

"The Post: Anyone you're not happy with? (Laughter.)"

—*from a* Washington Post *interview with President George W. Bush (January 16, 2005)*