

David Sweetman

The Short History of Failed Ideas

1 Franz Anton Mesmer 1743–1815

Sheep advance across their heft,
drawn by the rusty horse-shoe
pinned to the gate. Rich and poor
experience this animal magnetism,
those with stained wool hanging
in the filthy ringlets of slum children
and those in their elegant cardigans.

One despairs of cure, bloated on clover
it lies in its Tolstoy shirt
waiting for the true physician,
the shepherd with a sharpened stave.
The others go on, feeling the pull
this way and that, this way and that
drawn by the old rusty horse-shoe.

2 Wilhelm Reich 1897–1957

The man in the raincoat enters
the red orgone box, presses
the instrument to his head . . .

dring, dring—dring, dring—
and at once, the primal
mass-free energy strikes.

Renewed, he yearns to try,
any number will do . . .
dring, dring—dring, dring—

but the cure has taxed his strength
and all that comes is his heavy breathing . . .
hurr, hurr—hurr, hurr—

3 Alfred Wegener 1880–1930

With comic menace
The fruit on the sampans
is laid out military style:

the papaya's caveman club
or the durian's antique
mustard-gas grenade.

The tourists enjoy the joke
until one is offered a coconut
lopped like a temple novice

with milk that looks so maternal
they turn away disgusted.
They prefer a more abstract beverage

and only the coke-tins
with tear-drop openings
seem sad at their leaving—

for this is the new Gondwanaland,
the adhesive white world rejoining
the continents, the Yin and Yang,

snug as chops in a pan,
and the airport runways
are ley lines that link us all.

4 Carl Jung 1875–1961

Her first premonition, a feather on an egg,
was the last of Icarus on Daedalus' skull. Next,
a spray of bird droppings under the eaves

she saw as the molten wax, the day
was hot enough. In the end it happened
while walking home from church: an old cow

alone, unbidden, trundled up between
the narrow hedgerows—the minotaur in drag
defeated by the green labyrinth; lost in age.

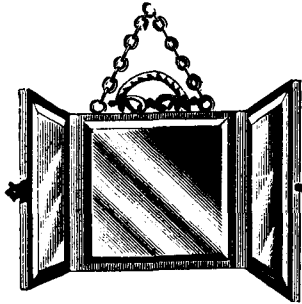
Suddenly she hates this well-read deceit,
she has seen the six-legged dog and why
it danced was clear, but terrifying, she runs

to the playground and swings high, clutching
the chains, Pasiphae in the unrelenting machine,
the rapid to and fro safely sheathed in myth.

NOTES & TOPICS

European Diary

Of Passing Scandals



Paris

USUALLY the sensational melodramatic questions of the day are confined to the boulevard press. But these days even the most sober and serious papers are putting breathtaking possibilities before the French reader. Did

President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing receive those valuable diamonds from ex-King Bokassa, and how did he dispose of them? Did Georges Marchais, chief of the French Communist Party, lie about his movements and whereabouts during the years of the Nazi Occupation?

The Central African scandal, a story which the satirical weekly, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, humourlessly pursued, is now to be taken up in the law courts as writs of libel fly furiously from the outraged members of Giscard's family. The mystery of Marchais' activities during the time when the Communist mythology had every good man and true fighting in the *Résistance* was lifted by the publication in *L'Express* (edited by Jean-François Revel and Raymond Aron, and published by Sir James Goldsmith, wearing his French hat) of several War-time documents which disclosed that Marchais had stayed on longer in Nazi Germany than he had previously disclosed... and as a volunteer worker.

Against such lurid happenings what do the other affairs amount to? How much time is left over to pore over the scandal which followed Cabinet Minister Robert Boulin's suicide, and his last letter accusing certain colleagues (members of the Chirac *Rassemblement*) of having organised a damaging whispering campaign against him? Here, too, the law is taking its course, with journalists lined up in a scrimmage against politicians.

I wonder how much such scoops, scandals, revelations and trials will actually change the Paris

political scene. Interestingly enough, none of the political parties appears to want to make any political capital out of any part of the exposés. The Socialists have been severely reprimanded by *L'Humanité* for deigning to show interest in such matters, although they and the Governmental parties have really been very reserved in their reactions to the Marchais case. Indeed, Jean-François Revel actually suspects that all the leading French radio commentators received special guide-lines to "play it down." As for Comrade Marchais himself, he has shrewdly offered to cooperate in any investigation of his life and letters, with only one condition—namely, that all the other leading politicians submit themselves to an inquiry looking into their War-time records and their peace-time bank-accounts.

Who knows but this rage for counter-investigation may lead to an inquiry as to whether journalists are themselves above moral scrutiny? (Documents are now circulating about the royal presents King Bokassa handed out to the visiting press.) I was reminded of the current Milanese ploy where charges against the terrorists, the *brigate rosse*, alternate with accusations of corruption against the judges and the economic leaders, the *brigate grasse*.

ALMOST by definition, "the latest scandal" doesn't last very long; each gives way to the next. Who still remembers (it was only three years ago) the assurance from Minister Poniatoski that the puzzle surrounding the mysterious murder of Prince Jean de Broglie (ex-Minister and businessman) had been solved and the guilty persons detained. Far from it; the police are still busy making their inquiries. . . .

I suspect that when the storms on Left and Right die down we will still see, in the dawn's early light, the solid figures of the President and the General Secretary in their respective places. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has the unshakable self-confidence, the *désinvolture*, which goes with his protected life and brilliant career. His "aristocratic" family tree may be of more recent dating than he likes to pretend, but he does have something of a nobleman's traditional contempt for what are considered to be bourgeois prejudices, and questions are not answered nor charges denied. Never apologising and never explaining can be a sovereign posture which impresses.

In the face of charges that he had no legitimate militant background in the anti-Fascist *Résistance*, Marchais almost broke into tears. Petty-bourgeois sentimentality, perhaps; for there is no reason to believe that he would lose any working-class votes in the Party's proletarian strongholds simply because he wasn't, long ago, deported to Germany but stayed on, for one reason or another, as a