

has usefully fleshed out the historical record. Yet in the wake of the Bork nomination, presidents and the public think differently about nominations and the court. Thus it is highly unlikely that future presidents will learn how to pick confirmable nominees from the way President Truman or President Kennedy went about the job. Yalof's underlying insight remains valid: The nomination process is the often overlooked key to the confirmation process. But however great the care and foresight exercised by the next president, promising nominations will sometimes implode and confirmation hearings will sometimes take dramatic turns. Despite Prof. Yalof's able analysis, ultimately the Supreme Court nomination process remains today far more a political art than a political science.

The Arrogant Amateur

By JAY NORDLINGER

WAYNE C. BOOTH. *For the Love of It: Amateuring and Its Rivals*. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. 256 PAGES. \$22.00

WAYNE BOOTH'S *For the Love of It* is a small book that will sell few copies and delight almost all who read it. Booth had a fine idea for a book; he executed it in his halting, highly idio-

syncratic way; and he left a product that those much like him will clutch to their hearts. A handful, though, will find it an infuriating book, written by an infuriating man — one who, moreover, would probably be surprised to learn that he can infuriate anyone.

He is a retired professor of English from the University of Chicago, and he plays the cello. His book is an exploration of what he calls "amateuring" — the pursuit of an activity solely for the satisfaction and fulfillment it affords. His "celloing" (another of his coinages) is at the center of it, and he asks some very good questions: What is the purpose of "amateuring," given that "full success" is "always out of sight"? And — this is vitally important — how should we spend our time? In what ways do we kill it, squander it, or redeem it?

Booth raises these and a hundred other absorbing questions, but he frequently veers off course, making room for innumerable crotchets, fulminations, and boasts. He appears to try to squeeze every last drop of himself into this modest (in one sense) volume. "We amateurs never play without a lot of talk," he concedes, and, indeed, he seems to have spent as much time analyzing and yakking about his life, musical and otherwise, as he has actually living it. He repeats himself, repeatedly. And he writes incessantly about his own writing: what he is about to write, what he has just written, what he will write chapters later. His book might have been better off as an extended essay, a pamphlet, distributed among friends and family who cherish him.

For all his formal learning — on ample display throughout the book — Booth is something of a cracker-barrel

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philosopher. He is a familiar American type: the wise, kindly, slightly gruff, somewhat New Agey older gent. There is a good deal of Robert Bly, the “men’s movement” poet, in him, as there is of Charles Kuralt, Andy Rooney, Garrison Keillor, Robert Fulghum (of *Everything I Know . . .* fame), and the actor with the bushy white mustache and wire-

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rimmed glasses who appears in Quaker Oats commercials. You will have Booth exactly when you realize that he is the perfect reflection of the sensibility of National Public Radio. He would be a smash over its airwaves. When he writes of “my beloved bicycle,” we smile in non-surprise. He is probably a world-class recycler as well.

“Musical memories are among my earliest,” Booth confides; “the only rivals are of physical pains and parental punishment for sexual exploring” (a loose spirit from the start, Wayne Booth). He grew up in Utah, in a “puritanical” Mormon family, a fact that he finds frequent occasion to flog and lament. Like countless other music-lovers, he remembers his first big

orchestral concert, when “[m]y closest friend, just a year before he died on the operating table at fourteen [this is a typical Booth touch], invited me to go with his family north to the big city to hear Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Mormon Tabernacle.” Young Booth was, of course, transfixed.

With World War II, he was conscripted into the Army, where, waiting for action, he had the opportunity to listen to great amounts of music on LP: “[H]ow few are the chances,” he notes truthfully, “for such totally free, fully active listening.” As it happened, Booth was spared combat duty, needed back in an office for his typing skills. This turn of events brought on a crisis of faith: “I came to an absolute decision about God, for the first time since my childhood orthodoxy. It was not just a strong suspicion, but a firm rejection: any God who could play an unfair trick like this on those miserable buddies was no God at all. He had died, and along with Him the music faded.” In time, however, the “music came back, blessedly, though my original God never did return.” Booth is ever-eager to tout his religious skepticism. His religion, in effect, became music, an outlook he discusses with much fanfare in his final chapter, where he is at his most mystical and fantastic.

One thing there is no denying: Booth loves music; loves it madly; loves it even to the point of making an idol out of it. His book is filled with the sort of music-worship that professional musicians tend to scorn as overearnest and foolish. Yet Booth engages in a conceit: that to play badly, in the act of “amateurizing,” is particularly virtuous. He, with his hacking and his tears of

joy (Booth is forever weeping in this book, demonstrating his superior feeling), is purer than thou. He alone can grasp the nobility of music. Everyone around him is baser, less appreciative, less attuned to the “spheres.” Furthermore, he is the type of person — call them musical socialists — for whom chamber music is the be-all, end-all. Individual playing is selfish, cold, a little heartless. He quotes a chamber pianist as having said that he preferred to perform with others because “solo work is bare and lonely” — a perfectly legitimate opinion, but, you know: Speak for yourself, Mac.

MUCH OF WHAT Booth expresses about music is sound, if prosaic. Yet his judgments are far from unerring. He is the kind of amateur who moans about, and belittles, the use of exercises in training. He upbraids those he derides as “drillers” and resents those of his teachers who, we can infer, tried to make him a respectable player by giving him a little technique. About one of his teachers, Booth complains that “love never entered our lesson room.” Maybe, but perhaps that teacher wanted Booth to know the (incomparable) joy of playing well — wanted him to love music so much that he would work to reproduce it acceptably. Booth is also cocksure in such statements as that Beethoven “surely would grieve over the number of times the theme of the fourth movement of his ninth symphony gets corrupted on TV commercials these days.” Oh? Actually, Beethoven would probably get a huge kick out of it — he borrowed that tune, anyway.

Part of Booth’s shtick is self-depreca-

tion, but he seems not really to mean it. He always winds up the hero of his own stories and observations, even when he pretends, initially, to chastise himself. (Ben Franklin is said to have remarked that he was wary of being humble, because he feared he would be proud of it.) No page of this book, no twist or turn, fails to reveal something

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wonderful about Wayne Booth. His granddaughter says to him, “The trouble with you, Granpa, is that you’re always thinking, thinking, thinking.” After an unpleasant episode with a music coach, in which Booth has behaved badly, someone else assures him, “Well, you know, Rachmael [the coach] is desperate to be loved. Beneath his air of security, he is extremely insecure.” Rachmael will no doubt appreciate that revelation. After quoting an example of youthful deep-think from his journal, Booth writes, “Though that bit of theodicy is clumsy, I’m still moved by it, and even a bit impressed by it” — if he says so himself.

Booth seems at times unable to hear the sound of his own voice. He has a rather unseemly taste for pathos, even

the macabre. He makes too-frequent use of his son's death, publicly working out his grief in the fashion so admired today. His wife, a violinist, once fell and broke her knee, and "[f]or weeks there was no cello or violin practice, no quartet playing. I was filled with the fear that the injury would not heal. My unspoken thought was, 'I'll have to live

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with an aging, crippled wife from here on.' " Why speak it now? The author is candid, yes, but also a touch creepy.

ABOUT POLITICS, Booth is even more bothersome than about music. He cites George Sand's defense of the arts, then claims that her words "might make a good retort to those members of Congress who argue that government funds should be cut from the [National Endowment for the Arts] and thus reserved for what is defensible as useful (for many of them that would be lower taxes for the wealthy)." Thus does the English Department write talking points for the Democratic National Committee.

Later, in one of his asides/sermonettes, Booth denounces the "Murdoch media" and their "suppression . . . of news about China that might hurt the boss's income." HarperCollins, it is

true, declined to publish Christopher Patten's book about Hong Kong, but Booth is apparently unaware that a Murdoch magazine, the *Weekly Standard*, is the leading anti-Beijing journal in all Christendom. When the cracker-barrel philosopher gets cracking, the facts have little chance of gaining a hearing.

Toward the end of his book, Booth zeroes in on a particular villain, the man he posits as the anti-Booth (and thus as the anti-you-know-what of his book): Norman Podhoretz. For Booth, Podhoretz is the ultimate "sellout." He grossly misinterprets Podhoretz's 1967 memoir *Making It* to contend that it claims "money, fame, and power" are all that matters in life. Podhoretz, writes Booth, in a shockingly ignorant caricature, "regrets that it took him so long to discover that the greatest rewards in life come when one deliberately fights to get ahead of others. . . . That fight necessarily leads him to downgrade or even ignore such old-fashioned matters as truth, beauty, integrity, or high literary quality."

How to respond to this nonsense? Perhaps with the simple observation that service to "such old-fashioned matters as truth, beauty, [and] high literary quality" is, in fact, a neat description of Podhoretz's career. Booth seems incapable of disagreeing with someone without charging bad faith or stupidity on the other's part.

Again: This is an innocent little bunny of a book. It is almost a novelty item, to be passed out at a particularly classy county fair. How can it be so infuriating? It manages. And Booth — a bright, gifted, and, in many ways, admirable man — should trouble himself to examine why.

The Soccer Divide

By ANDREA
DI ROBILANT

JOE MCGINNIS. *The Miracle of Castel di Sangro*. LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY. 416 PAGES. \$25.00

SOCCER MANIA is spreading fast across the land — the national frenzy surrounding the success of the U.S. team at the women's World Cup was a powerful reminder. And despite all the hype, despite the hysteria of frazzled soccer moms and dads screaming their heads off every Saturday morning, the kids who actually play on those fields are getting better each year. They love the game, talent is blossoming, and with the help of shifting demographics in favor of the Latino population, a little brio is also finding its way into American soccer. Given the rapidly increasing pool of players, the resources, and the sheer doggedness with which Americans are mastering the game, there is no reason to think the U.S. team cannot compete with the very best, even perhaps winning the World Cup in 2006 or 2010. But at the same time, soccer in America will always be an acquired skill, a contrived love nurtured by necessity (the ultimate

test of globalization?) rather than instinct. It will never run in the blood, even as the blood changes.

Joe McGinniss's *The Miracle of Castel di Sangro* serves as a useful cautionary tale. Five years ago the author awoke in the throes of an inexplicable and overwhelming passion for the game of Pelé. His doctor told him, jokingly, he had probably suffered a small stroke — one that had impaired the part of the brain which prevents Americans from fathoming the subtle beauty of an art form the rest of the world venerates. An increasingly common "ailment," one is tempted to say. But McGinniss's fixation was in a category all its own. And soon he was mumbling abstruse statistics on the Italian premier league as if speaking in tongues.

In fall 1996 he tore up a million dollar contract for a book on O.J. Simpson, set forth from his family in Massachusetts ("leaves the comforts of home," is the way the publicists at Little, Brown quaintly put it), and moved to Castel di Sangro, a little town (pop. 5,000) in a remote part of the Abruzzi, nestled between the Bitter Mountains and the Valley of the Dead Woman. Nathaniel Hawthorne once described the region as "without enough of life and juiciness to be any longer susceptible of decay. An earthquake would afford it the only chance of ruin, beyond its present ruin." A recent Frommer's guide described it more succinctly as "arid and sun-scorched, impoverished and visually stark."

Not the most alluring of places, by any stretch. McGinniss, however, was on a mission and he did not amble into the town of Castel di Sangro per

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