THEBOOKCASE

black-robed cults kidnapping children, sacrificing virgins, and drinking their blood have been around for centuries. They are directed against those who are unusual and politically unpowerful. In the Middle Ages, it was the Jews. In this country, in the last century, such stories were spread about Catholics. The professional Satan hunters of today have their own suspects: homosexuals, immigrants, intellectuals, single working women.

The only way to protect these and other minorities is to shine the cool light of reason on the fears of hysterical mobs. *In Pursuit of Satan* shines quite brightly.

Charles Oliver is assistant editor of REASON.

A Tale of the Wind: A Novel of 19th-Century France, by Kay Nolte Smith, New York: Villard Books, 516 pages, \$22.00. The 1980s saw not only the discrediting of socialism but a weakening of its intellectual first cousin, modernism the doctrine that declares that repulsion and nausea are the chief purposes of art and that novelists should write small stories about hopeless lives. Although the avant-garde faith of the 1920s still holds sway among the mandarins who dispense grants, earlier romantic forms constructed upon traditional lines have begun to make a comeback.

Les Misérables and The Phantom of the Opera are popular not just because of the spectacles they present, but because their stories are epic, life-affirming tales that transcend ordinary experience. Most of the major movies of the 1980s were romantic epics, and the rising success of fantasy and science fiction partially comes from the sense of wonder and heroic adventure that the best sf stories provide.

Romanticism has also returned to the shelves of the local bookstore. Robertson Davies, for example, has become a bestselling writer because his tales immerse the reader in magic and grandeur. And Ayn Rand's enduring popularity as a novelist certainly comes as much from the grandeur and authority of her fiction as from the ideas her novels present. Kay Nolte Smith is, in many ways, a disciple of Ayn Rand. Like Rand, Smith is an individualist romantic with a healthy dislike for government. Smith's earlier novels, particularly *The Watcher*, were quite Randian in form, structure, and technique. But with each book, Smith has distanced herself from her teacher.

Her latest work, A Tale of the Wind, is a homage not to Rand but to the French romantic playwrights of the 19th century. The book begins with its characters watching the first production of Victor Hugo's Hernani in 1830 and ends with them seeing Edmond Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac 67 years later. It is Smith's longest, most complex, and best novel.

As the book opens, a dwarf known as Nandou rescues teenage urchin Jeanne Sorel from a life selling rags. Nandou is an actor infatuated with romantic ideas; he teaches Sorel to read by reading favorite passages from Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott. She is a quick learner and within a few years becomes a famous playwright whose best-known work, *The Dwarf Lord*, stars Nandou.

Although *A Tale of the Wind* describes three French revolutions (in 1830, 1848, and 1870), the characters, as they age and as they become increasingly cynical, become more passive. The young Nandou and Sorel rejoice in the overthrow of the Bourbons in 1830; 40 years later, they survive the terrors of the Paris Commune by eating rats, horses, and weeds. The only character who attempts to join the Communards dies in a hail of bullets.

A Tale of the Wind is a succession of intimate tableaux, not a large canvas; the book's center is the eternal conflict between parents and their children. But the novel is also a tribute to the power of words to uplift and transform our lives.

When Victor Hugo dies in 1885, one character meditates on his achievements: "She was marching in tribute not only to France's great poet, but to language itself, to the power and glory of words, which opened people's minds to each other and allowed the profoundest of thoughts to reach the simplest of men and women." It is a profoundly unmodern sentiment, from a grandly romantic author.

-Martin Morse Wooster

"The point is not that plundering the rich is immoral, but that it doesn't pay, doesn't reduce but increases inequality..."

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SELECTED**SKIRMISHES**

HOLY WATER

BY THOMAS W. HAZLETT

Q y the time you read this, you will **B**have already missed the opening lecture of Professor Thomas Hayden's new course offering at Santa Monica (junior) College, "The Environment and Spirituality." The idea sprang from the cosmic experience Mr. Hayden gained while jetting to and from the Amazon Rain Forest, whereupon he racked up a New Consciousness of shrubbery and beaucoup frequent flier miles. His plan, according to The New York Times, is to teach a "new earth-oriented religion." He will begin with the Bible. "We need to see nature as having a sacred quality," solemnly intones Professor of Spirituality Hayden, "so we revere it and are in awe of it. That forms a barrier to greed and exploitation and overuse."

Just the theoretical idea of Tom Hayden, gobbling up the planet's resources at a prodigious rate in his global junkets and quest for high public office and star-studded lifestyle, stepping out for spiritual awareness is awesome. Let us not be so grotesque as to point out that the globefloating Tom's ex-wife consumed most of the free world's known silicon deposits, an exploitation about which no one recalls hubby making a peep. Let us focus on the other mountains of ecological mishap staring us down: It looks as if it's going to take a miracle to save us from the imploding environmental mess.

Happily, the marketplace is running a special on miracles this epoch. New capitalist institutions of pollution-abatement are constantly emerging, pushed by market forces aided only in the most general sense by church services.

Example 1: The closest thing you'll find to a *perfect* fiasco is federal water. The government dams beautiful rivers and builds huge aqueducts through the middle of nature to bring artificially cheap water to the farm. Then farmers take this precious commodity to produce crops like rice in the California desert.

(Rice! You soak the rice fields like a marinade!) Rice, it turns out, is in such surplus that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been hugely subsidizing its export at way-below-cost prices to...Iraq. (Trust me. I'm not making this up.)

Now, of course, the California drought has millions of thirsty water consumers by their Perrier. But the solution cannot be found in yet another \$12-zillion dam construction project contracted out to drinking buddies of a powerful Texas congressman (thankfully, the professional environmentalists have fenced this off), and so necessity is the mother of markets: The state is finally allowing farmers to sell their water allocations to consumers.

When farmers (who use 85 percent of the state's water) are allowed to trade their water for cash, suburbanites get their morning showers back, farmers make more money for doing less work, taxpayers save a bundle on farm subsidies, the environment blossoms from reduced pesticide use—and no river is damned, which is a big reason the Environmental Defense Fund is the biggest special interest pumping the water-pricing cause.

An engineer with the California Department of Water Resources recently told an economist colleague of mine how strange it was for him to be in the business of supervising market trades as a solution to water demands. "My whole life has been water management—laying concrete," he mistily opined. Well the price of ridiculous state water projects, always expensive, finally became outrageous, and there's a new day dawning, old boy.

Example 2: To foul the air in major metropolitan areas of the United States, a firm must now purchase the "pollution rights" from an existing holder. By a simple two-step act of establishing a property right to pollute, and then fixing the amount of such rights to more pristine levels, we instantly create a reward system giving every market player a cash payoff for reducing offensive emissions. Trading companies have popped up to actively broker these permits; a commodity exchange has even been formed in Chicago. It's incredible what those greedy little pigs will do for a buck. Firms are finding thousands of new (and newly profitable) ways to cut the ecological crap.

Says an astonished executive with an L.A. firm which brokers pollution rights, "It's amazing what you can achieve if you speak to a company's bottom line. There's water in the desert if you give someone the incentive to find it." (These clichés get dated when they become too literal, I admit. But hey, sprinkle a little of Adam Smith's holy water on the environmental problem and you too will be amazed what turns green.)

In the debate over the Alaskan pipeline cutting through the Arctic Circle, the Aleuts are split. The tribes that own valuable oil rights are all pumped up to exploit the wilderness to the max by nightfall; those who don't are agin' it. American Indians may share a noble spirituality, but they don't let it interfere with their bottom line. Nor, in the end, do the rest of us.

So long as religious charlatans such as the Rev. Hayden demand so much of our spirits and so little of our brains, their piousness on the environment will be evident for what it is: so much intellectual litter. Many of us who harbor a serious attachment to the natural wonders are shocked and offended by this ecological rip-off. The Hon. Tom Hayden may have lost his aerobics partner, but he has certainly found his niche, right in there with Brother Swaggart and the atmospherically hazardous Jim & Tammy Faye. Praise the Lord—and pass the recycled toilet paper.

Contributing Editor Thomas W. Hazlett teaches economics at the University of California, Davis.