

logues with glaringly little knowledge of or feeling for art. ♦

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ROGER KIMBALL

BEGIN WITH THE FAMILIAR: My first suggestion would be Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, not only because it is one of the most perfect novels ever written, but also because of its abundant wisdom. Some thoughtless people, noting how delightful Jane Austen's novels are, mistakenly conclude that they must therefore be superficial entertainments. They err in believing that what delights cannot also instruct. In fact, Austen's novels—the best of them, anyway—are as deep as anything by Dostoyevsky, just not as gloomy.

Austen had originally intended to call the book *First Impressions*, and one of her major themes is what we might call the ripening of first impressions into considered judgments. Austen is too wise to believe we should dispense with prejudice: "Prejudice," Edmund Burke said, "renders a man's virtue his habit." But Austen also knew that prejudice, lest it degenerate into complacency

or worse, must be educated, tested against experience. That is one of the great lessons of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Another lesson has to do with the education of appetite. When Lydia and Wickham elope, Elizabeth sadly reflects on "how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue." The right ordering of passion and virtue is a constant theme in Austen's novels. It is also the chief subject of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's magisterial inquiry into the workings of moral life. I offer Aristotle's *Ethics* as my second book, partly because it is a stupendous compendium of insight about the human heart, partly because of its immense influence through the ages, and partly because it is comparatively neglected today.

Aristotle, like Jane Austen, was an antisentimentalist. He was level-headed. He saw things clearly and sought to call them by their right names. "Only a blockhead," he observes, "can fail to realize that our characters are the result of our conduct." And again: "It is our choice of good or evil that determines our character, not our opinion about good or evil." A final example: "We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. . . . In a word, our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities."

At a time when convention is condemned as "inauthentic" and habit is repudiated in favor of novelty, Aristotle's book provides a reliable anchor in prudence and other civilizing virtues. We have been living off the capital of civilization for so long that we naturally forget what herculean efforts had to be mobilized to accumulate that capital in the first place. Aristotle's *Ethics* provides an account of what fully-fledged civil-

ized life looks like; *Physics and Politics*, a short masterpiece by the nineteenth-century English essayist Walter Bagehot (pronounced "badge-it"), provides a sort of natural history of how civilizations developed.

They develop slowly and painfully. That is Bagehot's chief message: That the movement from savagery and barbarism to civilization and the rule of law is nasty, brutish, and long. Being the beneficiaries of millennia of struggle, we are tempted to pretend that the struggle never existed or was somehow incidental to the relative tranquility we now enjoy. Bagehot's unflinching inquiry into the constituents of civilization is a salutary antidote to temptation.

Austen, Aristotle, and Bagehot were realists. So was David Stove (1927-1994), a brilliant but little known Australian philosopher. Almost anything by Stove could be read with immense profit. His most important work concerned irrationalism in the philosophy of science, that benighted swamp of confusion popularized by covert irrationalists like Karl Popper and Thomas "Mr. Paradigm Change" Kuhn. But Stove was also an occasional essayist of scintillating power and insight. And my fourth suggestion is his long essay "The Intellectual Capacity of Women" (available in my anthology of Stove's writings, *Against the Idols of the Age*).

I have noted with some amusement that even the title of Stove's essay on women tends to elicit a frisson of anxiety. "He is not going to... He wouldn't dare... You don't mean to say that he actually argues. . . ." Well, yes. "I believe," Stove writes in his first sentence, "that the intellectual capacity of women is on the whole inferior to that of men." He offers as his main reason for this belief the uncomfortable observation that "the intellectual performance of women is inferior to men." In other

words, he explains, it is the same sort of reasoning as that which convinces us that "Fords are on the whole inferior to Mercedes; or as that which convinces dog-fanciers that Irish setters are not as smart as labradors; or as that which convinces everyone that the intellectual capacity of seven-year-old children is on the whole inferior to that of nine-year-olds. They do not do as well, and we infer from this that they cannot do as well." Of course, this is not, Stove readily acknowledges, proof: "performance is no infallible guide to capacity." Still, "it is, in the end, the only guide we have or can have."

Is Stove right? I really don't know. Would it matter if he were? Probably not. But at a moment when young women are surrounded by a chorus of feminist claptrap, how refreshing it would be to entertain, if but momentarily, a contrary opinion that, even if mistaken, is carefully argued, wittily expressed, and genuinely provocative. Jane Austen would doubtless have raised an eyebrow if confronted with David Stove's essay. But I suspect she would also have been amused. She might have penned a compelling reply. One thing we can be sure of is that she would not have started whining about misogyny and the depredations of patriarchy. ♦

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MARY LEFKOWITZ

THE BOOKS I HOPE young women would read are the same books I would hope young men would read, and the same books I hope every thinking per-

son would read. The main problems we all must face come not from being male or female, or young or old, or black or white, etc., but from being human, and it is a pity that these days we are more preoccupied with our differences than with what we have in common. What we have in common is mortality (perhaps the biggest problem of all), not only our own mortality, but that of those we love. It seems also that war has been, always been, central to human existence, and it has never been a good or happy solution, even though it can bring out the best, as well as the worst in human beings. So I'd recommend *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, and the *Aeneid*. I'd throw in some Greek dramas too if I had a fifth choice. It's not (since I'm a classicist) that these are the only books I've read. It's just that these are the books that I loved when I first read them and that I've turned to constantly during my life, especially in difficult times. And what other kinds of times are there? ♦

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JAMES BOWMAN

MY RECOMMENDATION to any young woman would be to fortify herself against the impending and inevitable assault upon the "patriarchy"—which is the feminist word for life as we have known it for as far back as anyone can trace—by looking at four nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English novels (always to be preferred to novels in translation if only because you want to get the period flavor of the language as well as the social background), in

which strong women show that life under the old dispensation is rather poorly accounted for in terms of men's "oppression" of women.

Not, of course, that it cannot be so accounted for. The beauty of "gender studies" as of other forms of neo-Marxism as a way of looking at the world is that everything can be made to fit the prescribed pattern. But the reader who encounters at an impressionable stage Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, or Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or Lilly Dale in Trollope's *Small House at Allington*, or Sophia Baines in Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale*—to name just the first four out of a whole galaxy of possibilities that come to mind—will have a much harder time keeping her focus on women as mere victims of the male social hegemony in those benighted times.

For these feminine "role-models" are all at least as much the victims of men and of social forces as today's career women who are sexually harassed or encounter glass ceilings or are not given enough maternity leave, but none wastes her life supposing that some political magic solution would bring (or, worse, would have brought) all her troubles to an end.

Anne Elliot, for instance, must face the consequences in her extended spinsterhood of an excessive prudence in her youth (not a common dilemma!) in rejecting the man she loved. Becky Sharp copes with the social disadvantage of being poor and orphaned by hardening herself to make use of her wit and beauty without love—and without scruple. Lilly Dale gives her heart as only a woman can give it who knows that the marriage vows mean what they say and then is thrown over for another. Sophia Baines marries a worthless wastrel for love and, when he leaves her, grimly sets out with habits of thrift