

and working classes and bankrolls our candidates for high office.

Michael Washburn is the assistant editor of *Chronicles*.

The Straussian Sidestep

by Marco Respinti

Leo Strauss e la destra americana
by Germana Paraboschi
Rome: Editori Riuniti;
162 pp.



Dr. Germana Paraboschi's *Leo Strauss e la destra americana* (*Leo Strauss and the American Right*) is one of the few serious studies of the American right to come out of Italy. Dr. Paraboschi is a young scholar, born in Milan in 1961 and now living just outside Pavia. She spent several years in the United States, studying American conservatism. But curiously enough, her book was published by Roman Editori Riuniti, the publishing house of the Democratic Party of the Left, born from the ashes of the Italian Communist Party (an example of how leftists are light-years ahead in the cultural war, and in studying the enemy).

After surveying the movements that made up the postwar American right, Paraboschi ponders the work of Leo Strauss and the debate between the different Straussian schools. She reconsiders the Burkean school within the Old Right and sets the thought of Paul Gottfried and Claes Ryn—two scholars who decisively support transcendent values and thus escape the relativism popular in European historiography—as the main alternative to Strauss and the Straussians. To her, Gottfried and Ryn are correct in stressing the importance of principles to a sound and self-conscious philosophy of conservative thought. They realize that historical consciousness must be grounded on values, of which history itself is the vassal.

Paraboschi also analyzes Strauss's defense of objective values and Natural Law. As she explains it, the Straussians abstractly approach Natural Law as if it were a Shakespearean *persona* to advance

one's own agenda; they try to lend legitimacy to their arguments before traditional and conservative audiences with frequent references to antiquity. But actually, there is nothing ancient or traditional (in the Latin sense of *tradere*, to hand something down) in their arguments, which defend objective values out of their context and historical dimension. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution did the same thing, considering values and virtue (public virtue to be advanced forcibly by the Leviathan state, the only source of right and wrong) in an abstract way.

Guido Alpa, in the introduction to the new Italian edition of Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, states that when the first Italian version of this book was published in 1957, liberals and secularized Italians rose up against it, since Natural Law was considered a heritage of classical thought, commonly judged "reactionary" and defended only by Roman Catholics. Alpa gives this as the reason why Strauss is not appreciated in Italy, a country surrounded and polluted with a progressive, liberal, and radical culture.

On balance, I consider it absurd to attack and undermine Natural Law theory by using history in this abstract way. The founding of America, for example, showed first principles embodied in a particular time and place. But if we consider the self-evident truths and the language of the Declaration of Independence both as a supreme revelation of a historical reality, and as the sole light by which to view the whole American experience, we fall into the mistake of not considering what actually happened (the concrete reality of history), and to give to words and facts a presumptive meaning out of context. This is the way liberal European scholars normally interpret the American Revolution—i.e., as a subversive, progressive, even radical invention announcing the new age of ideology and the arrival of the Leviathan state. The French Revolution *was* such an invention, but not the American one; nor was the American Revolution the willing parent to the French Revolution.

Separating itself from abstract Natural Law theory, from idealism, and from relativistic historicism, true conservative thought has to defend the alliance of historical consciousness with supreme objective values. As Russell Kirk said, "History . . . is the gradual revelation of a supreme design—often shadowy to our blinking eyes, but subtle, resistless, and

beneficent. God makes history through the agency of man."

The work of Paul Gottfried and Claes Ryn's National Humanities Institute—aimed at defining and defending "value-centered historicism"—is the philosophical good battle being fought today. It is also the important premise for establishing a sound philosophy of history connected to what medieval scholasticism called *quaestio de veritate* (the question of Truth). Here is a true counterrevolutionary and conservative philosophy.

Marco Respinti is the editor of a forthcoming series of books in Italy on Anglo-American conservative thought.

Bookman's Holiday

by Gregory McNamee

A History of Reading
by Alberto Manguel
New York: Viking;
372 pp., \$26.95



Saint Ambrose, the reputed author of the Athanasian Creed, did not move his lips when he read. Neither did Ambrose's pupil and colleague Saint Augustine. The Roman chroniclers who witnessed this feat thought it only a curiosity, and the provincial missionaries' example took generations to become the ruling style of reading in the West.

Regardless of how it is done, reading is a social act, involving a history of formal and informal accords establishing that written words have certain meanings and shapes, that they are to be used in certain ways. Reading is also, of course, an intensely individual act: each reader approaches a text differently, bringing to bear experience and personality on another's words. It is a complex mental activity, involving several areas of the brain at once. Reading is physiologically complex as well, demanding that the eyes dart around the page hundreds of times each second to take in bits and pieces of visual information.

All of these matters are of profound interest to Alberto Manguel, a multilingual Argentine now living in Canada,

who ranges comfortably along the thousands of years that make up the history of literacy to spin a narrative that runs from cave paintings to CD-ROM, from ancient Chinese “bone-shell scripts” carved on turtle carapaces to technologies not yet in place. His *History of Reading* spans vast territories of the mind, dropping names and tantalizing arcana, pausing to ponder, in the space of a few paragraphs, the multiple layers of meaning of a medieval illuminated Bible, the *double entendres* of an advertisement for vodka, and the iconography of Eleanor of Aquitaine’s tomb (completed in 1204) which, fittingly enough, depicts her reclining in bed to read a book propped on her stomach.

Manguel’s cosmic history of reading as social fact is also a personal one, an affecting memoir of a lifetime surrounded by books, the typical retreat of the lonely child. Less solitary in adulthood, Manguel has had the good fortune of enjoying bookish companions, notably the fellow Argentine writer and consum-

mate reader Jorge Luis Borges, to whom Manguel read after Borges became blind in old age. The infirmity did not, Manguel writes, slow Borges down in the least; “the listener . . . became the master of the text,” pausing for reflection, repeating words and phrases, and calling for other books to illuminate the first.

Democratically minded, Manguel joins this story to a portrait of Cuban cigar rollers who appoint one of their number to read them a story as they work, a long-standing favorite being Alexandre Dumas’s *Count of Monte Cristo* whose name honors a cigar of exceptional quality. Presumably these workers are happier and better adjusted than are their Muzak-fed counterparts, for elsewhere Manguel examines favorably psychologist James Hillman’s notion that readers of stories, especially those used to reading early in life, have better psychic armor and a better-developed sense of the world than those who are introduced to stories late or not at all.

Manguel darts about from century to century and topic to topic, from the contents of Lady Murasaki’s pillow box to famous forgers of the Napoleonic era. But he returns often to several themes, foremost the idea that knowledge—bookish knowledge—is a form of power. Recalling his homeland, Manguel notes that it is for this very reason that most governments do not go out of their way to educate their citizens to be close, critical readers. “Demotic regimes demand that we forget,” he writes, “and therefore they brand books as superfluous luxuries; totalitarian regimes demand that we not think, and therefore they encourage the consumption of pap.” One has only to consider the current best-seller lists to recognize that Manguel’s point applies to the United States, as well as to Argentina.

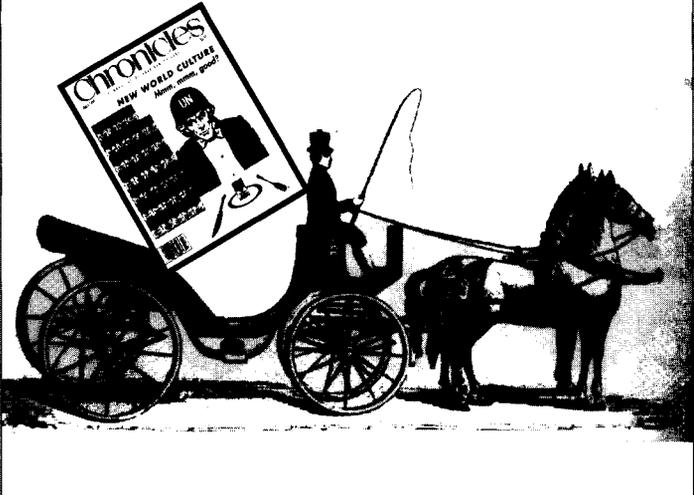
Political power is ever present in Manguel’s discussion: he notes that ancient Alexandria owed its great library to the requirement that the ships passing through its port surrender any books on board, to be copied; considers the laws of ancient Rome—and of the antebellum American South—prohibiting slaves to read or be taught to read; and notes that the Pinochet government, years after it came to power, banned *Don Quixote* from Chile in 1981 for the reason that this most bookish of novels sets the good of individuals over that of the state. Sometimes Manguel’s examples are captivating, as with an anecdote about the Grand Vizier of Persia, Abdel Kassem Ismael, who ordered that his library of 117,000 volumes accompany him while traveling, borne by a caravan of 400 camels, arranged in alphabetical order. Others are horrifying, like his account of the life of the martyr William Tyndale, a printer who at the order of Henry VIII in 1536 was strangled and burned at the stake (ostensibly for the heresy of printing a new translation of the Bible, but in fact for having criticized the king for divorcing Catherine of Aragon).

“Reading, almost as much as breathing, is our essential function,” Manguel ventures. Dispelling the claim that reading is a dying art in a time when the mass production of books continues to rise, his own rich book honors the magic of literacy. Every bibliophile will find much of worth in its pages.

Gregory McNamee’s most recent book is *A Desert Bestiary*, published by Johnson Books in Boulder, Colorado.

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Letter From Boston

by Eugene Narrett

The Return of Katherine Ann Power

Last fall, an editor at my suburban Boston daily urged readers to reflect on “a personal essay, lyrical but not flowery,” by one of our “neighbors” at the Massachusetts Correctional Institute in Framingham, the state penitentiary for women. “The least we can do,” he wrote, “is put our ears against the tall brick walls” and let Kathy Power tell us about her “community.” This might seem a modest and charitable request, if the name Katherine Ann Power didn’t ring a bell. But once the history that led her to MCI is revisited, you may decide you know more than enough about “Kathy” without needing to absorb her latest exercise in self-pity.

On September 23, 1970, there was an armed robbery at the State Street Bank on Western Avenue in the Brighton section of Boston. Two men and one woman burst in, shouted “we mean business,” and fired into the walls. It was politically motivated violence: the stolen cash was to finance attacks on “the state,” and somehow impede the war in Vietnam.

The armed robbers were Susan Saxe, William Gilday, and Stanley Bond. The last two were high school dropouts and ex-cons, attending Brandeis University as “special students,” under an early type of affirmative action. They stored their weapons and stolen ammo in the apartment of fellow student Katherine Power, a rich girl from Denver, who shared their political and criminal agenda.

When the three robbers emerged onto Western Avenue, officer Walter Schroeder, a father of ten, had responded to a call and was waiting behind his patrol car. With a burst of machine-gun fire, Gilday shot and mortally wounded

Schroeder, who died a few hours later. A mile from the bank, the criminals hopped into the “switch” car driven by Power. Soon afterward, Gilday, Bond, and Saxe were caught; Power vanished. In 1984, assuming she was dead or out of the country, the FBI removed her from its Most Wanted List. A little more than three years ago, she reappeared in Boston and became a celebrity.

Having negotiated surrender to the FBI via several big-shot lawyers, Power is serving 8 to 12 years for manslaughter, but she still sees herself as victim and heroine in an epic of youthful idealism. “I seem to be a carrier for a lot of people’s stuff,” she writes, adroitly using New Age idiom to shift responsibility for her imprisonment onto the presumed emotional needs of other people.

It is hard to blame Power completely for her confused self-image. She has had and still has noisy cheerleaders. The political climate in the Boston area has been so disordered for so long that when Power surrendered, the media, and some public officials, exalted her. A lawyer called her “an icon for public morality,” and a district attorney praised her ethics. A reporter who interviewed her in 1994 wrote that Power’s life as a fugitive “exemplified charity, nonviolence, and social activism.”

What had Power done to earn this Christ-like accolade? After her accomplices killed Officer Schroeder, she disappeared into an underground of feminist safe-houses and speculum parties. To disguise her identity, she took the name of an infant, Alice Metzinger, who had died in 1948, the year Power was born. During her shrewd getaway, Power conned the government for small business loans, cooked gourmet health food, and ran a chain of restaurants. She wore Birkenstock sandals (when she surrendered, the media highlighted this fact), sorted through sex partners, and had an illegitimate child (she remains unsure of the child’s paternity). She was very “right on.” The fact that she cooked polenta was itself nearly enough to acquit her in the *Boston Globe*. Those who celebrated her hardly noticed that her “charity” did not include service to Walter Schroeder’s widow, Marie, or to the

ten fatherless children. But then, like Daniel Faulkner, the police officer shot to death by Mumia Abu-Jamal in Philadelphia, Walter Schroeder was a white man whose death scarcely registers with promoters of “social justice.”

While left-wing reportage swooned over Power’s “nonhierarchical anarchist values,” a few who worked for her out West offered a different portrait. One remembered her as “a strong presence in the kitchen, not known for tolerating mistakes. She’d yell at you in a voice you could hear through a closed door.” Another acquaintance recalled that Power had instructed her young son not to ask about extended family. “Doesn’t he ever wonder about it?” a former friend had asked. “No,” Power replied. “He knows we don’t talk about that.” Her recent columns suggest that Power remains too absorbed in self-exploration to focus on her son’s dilemma. While her essays often expatiate on cosmetic matters, she has yet to mention missing her son or husband.

Along with her aesthetic focus on diet and appearance, as an idealist, Power remains more interested in motives than relationships. She feels she had good reason for her actions in college, was virtually compelled to do as she did. “I was looking for a nonviolent way to act effectively [against the war], but it didn’t exist,” she told an interviewer. A National Merit Scholar, Power claimed there was no way a person could protest the war in Vietnam without participating in armed robbery. Circumstances made her do it. She was the *real* victim, a victim of her times. Reporters eagerly regurgitated this convenient theorizing.

Walter Schroeder’s daughter Clare, now 43 and newly retired from the police force in Waltham, Massachusetts, offers a clearer analysis of Power’s confusion. “She’s a very bright woman,” Schroeder noted. “All of the ammunition and weapons were stored in her apartment. There had to be a thought [her accomplices] were going to use it.” Power was so absorbed in the event’s existential value for her that its obvious potential harm to others dwindled to insignificance.

But Boston’s major newspaper, the *Globe*, assures readers that Power is not