

No time to visit the Botanical Gardens,
 Only time for cursory visits to Charles's father,
 Too rushed to relish his humour,
 No time for 'that fucking teddy bear'
 Can't fit the wit of Anthony in,
 No time for the schoolgirl charm of Cordelia,
 No time for Bridey's religious talk,
 No time to really examine Lady Marchmain,
 The visit to Morocco will have to be quick,
 Who cares why Sebastian is sick?
 No time for the storm on the ship,
 No time for the little red-haired man, Mr Kramm,
 No time for Julia and Julia's hysteria,
 No time to ready for Lord Marchmain's return.

Just enough time to get to Venice -
 Turn Cara into an amoral concubine,
 Sit Sebastian, Lord Marchmain, Julia together -
 In a preposterous tableaux of decadent living.

That's what it's all about, isn't it?

Slogans and Attitudes

The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia, by Christine Berberich. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 218 pp. \$99.95. Reviewed by Jonathan Pitcher, Bennington College.

If disinterestedness is sociologically possible, it can be so only through the encounter between habitus predisposed to disinterestedness and the universes in which disinterestedness is rewarded. Pierre Bourdieu, "Is a Disinterested Act Possible?" (88)

Christine Berberich's revisionary salvage operation forms part of a recent penchant for recognizing the continued existence of a series of atavistic structures -- Englishness, nostalgia, and chivalry among them -- an apparently unforgiving morphology that, however marcescent, will just not go away. The tone here is palliative as opposed to venomous, an act of epigonal rehabilitation rather than a *coup de grâce*, as the gentleman, through a definition of the term, his history, his literary history, and viable close readings of his survival in Siegfried Sassoon, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, and Kazuo Ishiguro, becomes the metonymic lens through which to view the contemporaneous English *geist*, the contiguities of national, class, and gender identity.

Broadly, the analytical flux of each chapter moves from the gentleman's inherited sense of privilege to cultural *ataraxia* to the equivocal nostalgia of the present. In Berberich's words, "Whereas in the sixteenth century it was essential for a gentleman to have a coat of arms, the emphasis shifted in the eighteenth century to attitude and manners" (9), though it was "the nineteenth which saw the heyday of the ideal" (18) as "'the Victorians ... set up factories for gentlemen in their public schools'" (Philip Mason qtd. 18), and this sportier, denser, more bourgeois, "neo-Spartan" (22) version is henceforth compelled to deal with modern vagaries, no doubt lost in the local Asda, dreaming of jumpers for goalposts, lowing herds, leather on willow, and fistfuls of crumpets for tea. Initially, at least, the teleological process is perceived as non-revolutionary, announced by the choice of L. S. Lowry's *Gentleman Looking at Something* on the cover, wherein the man in question, decked out in wellies and an overcoat that has surely

seen better days, seems drab, adrift, and confused, as if peering reluctantly into the void. The modest introductory pages rest entirely on debunking this abyss, on “Robin Gilmour’s 1981 comment that ‘the gentleman has faded from the literary landscape because he has been absorbed by democracy without being resurrected’” (11-12), for “It is the main aim of this book to contradict this statement and to show that the gentleman is still alive and well as a literary trope” (12). Much rests on our acceptance of Gilmour, therefore, and it is an odd premise, for if we always assumed, *a priori*, that some anemic semblance of the gentleman is indeed “still alive” (12), and that the real question is ethical, based on his wellness or lack thereof, then Berberich’s subsequent insistence on the mere accumulation of more modern exempla of the trope in the ensuing pages with only intermittent, attitudinal dabbling in ideology may seem increasingly jejune, if not disingenuous. The bulk of the argument becomes quantitative, and if we already knew that rumors of the trope’s demise were greatly exaggerated, then such quantity becomes progressively obsolete.

In short, Berberich juxtaposes the boyish, pastoral idyll that dominates Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* with the few yet decisive pages on the First World War, thus rendering it as “a carefully constructed, almost modernist text” (51), a “fragmentation of the self” (65), the demystification of the gentlemanly ideal. Similar though more persistent *aphanisis* is available in Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*, where Nicholas Jenkins’s “old gentlemanly code” (77) is thrown into ever more anachronistic relief against the opportunism of Kenneth Widmerpool. The latter is defined as “a man of the present -- ambitious, hungry for power, ruthless” (84), “more adept at tackling problems” (84), a particularly malicious harbinger of the “healthier society to which we may look forward” (88), as he puts it, since rather than merely overhauling the system he succeeds in manipulating it for his own ends. Berberich even attempts to link such success to Powell’s fascination for Thatcherism, yet another neoteric form of interested gallantry. Waugh is everywhere, his repartee littered throughout, and he receives the longest, most panoramic chapter in the book, part of which appeared in *Waugh without End*. He is also a touchstone for Berberich’s lurking, iconoclastic ethical preferences, for the chapter opens with *Brideshead* being “rather too much for many readers” (95), emblematic of “the shortcomings of his later work” (96), its idolatry set against *Decline and Fall*’s “playful deconstruction and subversion of the idea of the gentleman” (114), with *A Handful of Dust* serving as the transition from “anarchic to apologetic” (115). *Sword of Honour*, of course, rife with perquisites and unrewarded supererogation, is just “a further retreat into a mythical Christian chivalry” (124), undercut by its author’s frequent bouts of less than gentlemanly behavior. This is all feasible literary criticism, though standard humanist stuff by now. Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* is rapidly becoming the *sine qua non* for studies of the epiphenomenal unwellness of the trope, of its lingering, macabre status, and under the bleak title “A Pillar Upholding Nothing” Stevens is again re-inscribed as hopelessly introspective, with “no point of comparison beyond what he has seen in books” (137), the victim of an abusive lord who in turn is the victim of “the indoctrination of a nation obsessed with chivalry and fair play” (152). The account is “highly unreliable” (142), not least because “it is riddled with devious self-justification” (143) in the midst of a now bankrupt system, ultimately deflated by Stevens’s moment of *peripeteia* and Berberich’s condemnation of “his failure to recognize that the notion of dignity is itself mythical” (144), which seems to be the book’s thesis, *parti pris*.

Perhaps it is less a thesis than a partiality. The wealth of quotation, particularly at the beginning, is so overbearing as to obscure more forthright arguments. The bibliography is more than a fifth of the length of the text, and although the investigation is laudably sedulous, at times it toys with becoming a reference book, tacitly staking out ideological ground under the guise of simple research. The oddly inverted, oscillatory title (*Englishness and Nostalgia* should surely appear before the colon) is indicative of such reticence, as if a grandiose theoretical schema is indeed waiting in the wings, a surprise chaser, hinted at but not fully disclosed or possibly not fully understood. The frequent gaps denoting internal subsections within chapters, literal *caesurae*, do not help with the philosophical relativism, since just as the evidence is sufficiently established and arguments are apparently ready to be prosecuted, we switch to the establishment of different evidence, thereby gradually hollowing out the book while its author’s opinions

become gradually more indiscrete.

Although the pivotal modern dilemma is the shift from “Is it true?” to “Whose interest does it serve?” Berberich openly focuses on “Is the ideal dead?” (7) rather than “Was it worthy in the first place?” If we accept that “‘Englishness’ these days often appears tinged with nostalgia, evoking images of a traditional, tranquil, in some cases even *mythical* England, rather those of Blair’s *Cool Britannia*” (23), and we are intent on exposing this myth, are we also reading an endorsement of the Blair years?

We are certainly reading, *pace* Stephen Greenblatt, an endorsement of self-fashioning, though “(... divorced from Greenblatt’s Renaissance background)” (16), and sadly from his measured ambivalence. As the gentleman’s *telos* fades, morphing into twentieth-century *hubris*, he increasingly becomes a “cultural construct” (43), a “social construct” (43), or a “social phenomenon” (43), which is not to say that Berberich argues for one particular set of constructions or phenomena over another, or suggests an alternative to the notion of constructedness, but rather revels in the newfound liberty of her subject’s deliberate self-definition. The final sentence of the book states that the image “has not only *fashioned* men throughout the decades but has itself proven to be -- in both meanings of the word -- a *fashionable* ideal” (164). While such *carpe diem*, subjective positivity is undoubtedly slick, I am less than convinced that Greenblatt’s version is quite so sanguine, for rather than accumulating a series of examples of Renaissance self-help, his book begins with an interrogation of our hermeneutics, and concludes, in his own words, “in a manner more tentative, more ironic than I had originally intended” (256), with at least the partial undermining of the ideal of self-fashioning itself.

Such reduction is symptomatic of an aleatory, visceral approach to theory. In addition to Greenblatt, “Foucault’s ideas of power discourses cannot be left out of consideration” (39), yet they are all but omitted after this vow of obligation. Pierre Bourdieu is also enlisted into the procedural framework, though only vicariously, through Anna Bryson’s *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*, which means that Berberich misses the passages explicitly related to chivalry and interest in Bourdieu, and despite his apparent indispensability he is never even mentioned again. It may be that Foucault and Bourdieu are indeed essential to any study of the English gentleman, but rather than fleshing out the perpetuation of their schema in context, a vague though forceful allegiance to them is initially overstated, leaving us with innuendo, a Foucauldian-Bourdieuian veneer that ensures a lurking suspicion of all kinds of potentially monolithic, evil superstructures which is never justified and yet impossible to dispute precisely because of the lack of justification. Homoeroticism, or rather Emily Eells’s less physical *Anglosexuality* (40), fares marginally better, for although there is a void of over seventy pages between Berberich’s introduction of the term and its subsequent use, a number of examples are assembled via the novels, such as George Sherston’s surname offering “further proof of the underlying homoeroticism of the novel: Sherston in the Cotswolds was the area where he [Sassoon] had often ridden with Norman Loder, the real-life Denis Milden” (63). Again, however, if the book is to transcend the encyclopedic, then rather than simply assembling evidence and propaedeutically assuming that the reader will somehow convert it into meaning, the proof in question must become that of Berberich’s argument on homoeroticism, which is latent at best. The Ryder-Flyte relationship, touted twice before the chapter on Waugh, of course “ties in with Eells’s perceptions of *Anglosexuality* as a form of ‘sex and sensuality’” (118), yet such burgeoning substantiation is then deflated within the book’s train of thought -- “But the homoerotic element is not the crux of the story” (118) -- which begs the question of why we endured the substantiation in the first place. By Berberich’s own admission, these theories constitute the backbone of the book, and they do endow the twentieth-century gentleman with an aura of sophistication, but over time the treatment of them is so *laissez-faire* as to produce the opposite effect, ultimately throwing the supposed sophistication into doubt, and spurring the notion that perhaps these were never the most appropriate theories for the matter at hand, even as they surreptitiously over-determine their object.

Given the subtitle, and the historical nature of the book, robust mnemotechnics would surely

be more in order. Instead, there is a quick doffing of the cap to Jean Baudrillard's *simulacra*, thus adding to the illusion that the latest in the series of supersessive layers of the past is in fact the most sophisticated, and a wholesale endorsement of Fred Davis's three definitions of nostalgia:

simple nostalgia (which, simply and plainly, means that 'things were better then'),
 reflexive nostalgia (a questioning [sic] whether the past was really better and, if so, why)
 and finally interpretative nostalgia (which analyzes and problematizes the feeling of
 nostalgia *per se*). (29)

I am less than convinced that this ever becomes more than a checklist here, a methodological hierarchy against which to measure the novels, rather than a vehicle to approach the content of memory, why we remember, or even how. There is surely an argument that the first variant could be more complex than the third depending on the quality of the "then" in question, with the third becoming the most superficial, yet rather than being problematized the definitions are instantly established as the all-encompassing, democratizing yardsticks of memory. Thus, in practice, and in the absence of a more differentiated paradigm, the post-transition Waugh is condemned to the simple, a fogey "closing his eyes to progress, and regressing into a mythologized past" (164), whereas Ishiguro "cunningly incorporates all three of Davis's forms of nostalgia" (155) and is therefore perceived as more complex, even though the content of Waugh's mythology, if considered, may prove less exoteric.

In the wake of the above, via litotes and a series of understated preferences, Berberich seems to overestimate the reader's affirmation of her tacit ideological spectrum. In the chapter on Waugh alone, she asserts that his "idea of the gentleman was a more traditional one, steeped in chivalry, and tainted by his increasingly religious stance" (99), without explaining such supposed contamination. Similarly, "Waugh's later gentlemen are far removed from reality" (133) is an implicit rebuke, though again quite why an overt connection to his milieu is necessarily preferable to less immediate alternatives is never clarified. The lightning-bolt contention that "there is no sense in chivalry if no one else is being chivalrous" (114) was worthy of many of Bourdieu's pages, for it negates altruism, and yet here it is simply taken for granted. Finally, in a series of examples that I have far from exhausted, the chapter dwells on Waugh's biographical hypocrisy, since his "own manners do not conform to the high standard against which he measured everybody else; in other words, they do not match the behaviour of an ideal gentleman" (99), though I remain uncertain as to when it was decided, either within the covers of this book or for that matter in the history of ontology, that ideas are bad when we fail to live up to their strictures, or our own expectations, or when they disadvantage us in material terms, or when someone else thought of them, or when they were applied before our time. In contrast, the treatment of *The Remains of the Day* is softer, nay duplicitous: while Stevens is defined as "a caricature" (146), the hyperbolic embodiment of an ideal that Berberich was only too keen to point out in the case of Waugh, Ishiguro deconstructs the blindness of his servitude, and therefore the caricaturing seems to be forgiven. The defense stretches as far as "Stevens' life has been based on the suppression and evasion of the truth" (143), as if truth, rather than mere interest, were suddenly a valid word now, though exactly what kind of truth is more nebulous, and the citing of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, for "Stevens neglects his dignity as an individual" (144), even though dignity has apparently been devalued over all of the preceding pages and Stevens is lambasted but one paragraph earlier for "his failure to recognize that the notion of dignity itself is mythical" (144).

This germ of a thesis, or of at least a counter-argument, however puzzling, is left adrift, for we are whisked off into a rapid-fire conclusion, as Berberich opts to reenter the maelstrom of accumulation, proving once and for all that "the image of the English gentleman did not disappear in [W. G. Sebald's] 'just one awful second'" (163) as she rattles through another list of more contemporary exempla, including John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library*, William Boyd's *Any Human Heart*, Merchant Ivory, *The Edwardian Country House*, Bond films, Barbour, Burberry, Harry Potter, and even a winner

of *Pop Idol*, Will Young, who courageously stood up to the judges on the show. Yes, I realize that these examples are different in degree, in their Englishness and their nostalgia, and that we are no longer sure of how, why, or what we should be salvaging, but there are only a few lines on each, and I'm off, belatedly, to reward my disinterestedness with a pinch of Gawith and a cheeky Chablis.

Works Cited

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Waugh and the Atheist

The God Delusion, by Richard Dawkins. 2006. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. 463 pp. \$15.95. Reviewed by John Howard Wilson, Lock Haven University.

In the paperback edition of his bestselling book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins invokes the name of Evelyn Waugh three times. *The God Delusion* advocates atheism, so one might expect Dawkins to dismiss Waugh as a deluded Roman Catholic. Instead, Dawkins tries to enlist Waugh in his crusade against faith. This choice of an unlikely ally points to larger problems with *The God Delusion*.

In his preface to the paperback edition, Dawkins mentions a humorous passage, an "incongruous mismatch between a subject that *could* have been stridently or vulgarly expressed, and the actual expression in a drawn-out list of Latinate or pseudo-scholarly words ('filicidal', 'megalomaniacal', 'pestilential')." Dawkins's "model" was "one of the funniest writers of the twentieth century," Evelyn Waugh (17). Needless to say, Dawkins never equals Waugh's style and humor, his logic and precision. *The God Delusion* is rather flaccid, apparently based on lectures, with many digressions and few arguments brought to a satisfying conclusion. Dawkins refuses to believe in God, but he does believe in himself, and he repeatedly refers to his other books and his web site. Waugh also wrote about himself, but that is the only similarity between his prose and Dawkins's.

In Chapter 2, "The God Hypothesis," Dawkins cites Waugh's diary, specifically the bet that Randolph Churchill couldn't read the Bible in a fortnight. Dawkins quotes Churchill saying "God, isn't God a shit!" and describes his reaction as that of a "naïf blessed with the perspective of innocence." According to Dawkins, Churchill had a "clearer perception" of God in the Old Testament, "arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction" (51). Dawkins does not mention that Waugh believed in God and disagreed with Churchill, so this incident is distorted.

In Chapter 10, "A Much Needed Gap?" Dawkins refers to Waugh's hallucinations and the novel that he wrote about them, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. Dawkins argues that "some time before 1000 BC people in general were unaware that ... the Gilbert Pinfold voice came from within themselves. They thought the Pinfold voice was a god: Apollo, say, or Astarte or Yahweh" (392). Dawkins neglects to add that Waugh never seems to have imagined he was listening to a god. Also omitted is Waugh's assumption that the voices came from outside himself—from the BBC, or psychologists operating at a distance, or, finally, demons. Using a case of bromide poisoning in the 1950s to interpret the history of humanity's religious belief is a bit of a stretch. For a scientist, Dawkins is remarkably casual about evidence.

In *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007), Christopher Hitchens portrays Waugh as a great writer misled by faith. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins uses Waugh's evidence without mentioning his religion. Only a small part of a much larger case, Waugh nevertheless turns up in both books. Waugh wrote almost automatically about religion, but even atheists seem to find his work irresistible.