

Western Christians have a fairly positive attitude toward Orthodoxy. (Protestants generally regard Orthodoxy as superior to Roman Catholicism and vice versa. We're everybody's second-favorite religion.)

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to discuss this matter, in the context of the current Balkan war, with His Grace, Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic) of Herzegovina, one of the infamous, supposedly "nationalist" bishops close to the Bosnian Serb leadership. He had come to Washington to plead his people's case to Western politicians and media, to point out that while Serbs were sinners, not angels, they were certainly not the demons our media made them out to be. In particular, he hoped to present documentary evidence of recent Croatian atrocities against the Orthodox in his diocese, mainly near the town of Medjugorje, the site both of World War II massacres and of an ongoing "Marian apparition" particularly popular among "charismatic" Roman Catholics. Naturally, no one was interested. Only atrocities committed—or said to have been committed—by Serbs have news value. (His Grace told me about little children running from him in terror in a Swiss airport when they heard he was a Serb.)

As we discussed the West's hostility to his plight, I advanced the following theory, which His Grace believed to have some merit: Yes, Pravoslavophobia does exist, but it is a prejudice in the purest sense of the word—a prejudgment based on ignorance, a bias resting on regional parochialism. This prejudice reflects the fact that we are different from Westerners, but they themselves are only vaguely aware of the nature of the difference. It is something they feel rather than think.

This requires some explanation. One of the shibboleths of contemporary Western thought is multiculturalism: an exaggerated, if condescending, affirmation of the worth of other races and nations, religions and cultures. In addressing a non-Christian, non-European civilization, a high-minded Westerner feels obligated to emphasize that their folkways are not only just as good as his but maybe even better ("They have so much to teach us!"). Indeed, in "celebrating their diversity," he may feel the need to denigrate his own social traditions, which, after all, are largely the handiwork of white, Christian, heterosexual males. However, the same enlightened Westerner does not experi-

ence the same pressures when confronting the Orthodox East as he would when speaking to or about, say, Mohawks, Zulus, Chinese, or Afghans. We Orthodox are different enough for him to feel that we are alien but not different enough for him to feel obligated to respect us.

In sum, he perceives us as warped, distorted versions of himself. When he looks at us, he sees a mangled version of his own face, which produces a vague, inarticulate sense of unease, if not revulsion. And since he can't be in the wrong—the problem must be us.

Here is perhaps the greatest irony of the East/West divide within Christendom. After all, the West was once Orthodox—while we were never Roman Catholic or Protestant. The ancient Christian kingdoms of England, France, Spain, etc., began their emergence from barbarism as *sub-Byzantine states and cultures*, displaying, of course, their own distinctive features, much as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, etc., differ from each other. In time, history was kinder to the West, which achieved its own distinctive cultural synthesis in the High Middle Ages, while the Orthodox East was crippled first by Ottoman/Mongol conquests (often aided by the depredations of our Western brethren) and then by a host of imported Western psychoses, like socialism. Even so, it is still clear, as a historical matter, that in the area of culture no less than religion, the West is derivative of the East, not the other way around.

In the closing decade of this millennium, sensitizing the West to its anti-Orthodox prejudice should not be seen as just one more example of whining and special pleading by yet one more "aggrieved" group. In the wake of two devastating intra-Christian civil wars (World War I and II), the once globally dominant European civilization—what some still quaintly refer to as Christendom—finds itself culturally, morally, religiously, and, perhaps worst of all, demographically moribund. At the same time, the non-European world, spearheaded by a reinvigorated and militant Islam no longer cowed by Western technical and military superiority, is on the offensive. As it happens, along virtually the entire front between Christendom and Islam (from the Balkans through the Caucasus and all through central Asia to the Chinese frontier) the frontline Christian states, *all of them Orthodox*, are not only actively engaged against the Muslim advance but,

in most cases, must contend with the West's tacit or explicit support for their foes. If for no other reason than self-interest, the West should seriously think out long-term consequences of a possible collapse of the Orthodox East. The throat you help slit today may turn out to be your own.

James George Jatras writes from Arlington, Virginia. A version of this article ran in the St. Sophia Quarterly.

REGIONALISM

That Demon Weed

by Joyce L. Bennett

When I hear all the talk about tobacco, I think of my Uncle Rollins, a green-visored straw hat on his salt-and-pepper head and a two-day stubble on his seasoned farmer face. He is standing in a field or by an unpainted barn as he crumbles a yellow-brown leaf and sticks a wad of 'bacca in his mouth to chew. August mornings and fields of the University of Maryland's number 64 plants topping out with white blossoms also come to mind when I reminisce about the raising of the infamous crop. During childhood summers blessed by just the right amount of rainfall, the tobacco would be tall and heavy with exquisitely shaped leaves. Midlife reverie sometimes takes me back to the dark, cool interior of my father's own barn, a place where children would build houses out of tobacco sticks and where copperheads were inclined to hide in the fall.

Autumn on a tobacco farm is gentle and slow and belies the reality of brutal July and August labor and men working and praying for the tiniest puff of breeze blown across the peninsula from salt-water rivers. I ache when I recall the dusty September smell of the harvested plants curing and with such a remembrance can briefly visit a life antithetical to what passes for living in these times. I am but one more old fogey, I suppose, looking to the past and dreading the future, but I consider myself fortunate to be able to mourn the passing of my tide-

water, country heritage. At least I have known such a life.

I am grateful that I was not raised like some hothouse flower, living in air-conditioned isolation from the natural world. I was never belted into a minivan and catapulted down a highway at 75 m.p.h. to be delivered by a stressed-out and preoccupied driver to the childcare center so both parents could go to work to pay an \$1,800-a-month mortgage on a poorly constructed development home where today's family abides for a time before career changes or the divorce. Any child who has not run barefoot down a row of tobacco is disenfranchised by my standards.

But in spite of an appreciation for my primitive, rural upbringing and my reverence for the tobacco-growing traditions, on a November morning in 1990, I quit smoking. I was home from work, sitting around drinking coffee and lighting up one Marlboro Light after another, when I ran out of cigarettes. In an instant, on that morning, I understood how tired I had grown of a habit that was more a burden than a pleasure. Since my father had died of a heart attack in 1987, I had been smoking but constantly worrying over what it was doing to my health. Daddy had smoked for about 25 years. I remember that as a little girl, I would hug him and that his white shirts had always smelled of Winstons, a soothing fragrance to a child who loved her father and who was growing up in tobacco country. His dying was not necessarily attributable to smoking since he had quit the habit several years before his death, but his passing away at the age of 65 had made my own glassy essence, at last, a reality to me.

Even as my anxiety had grown over the years, I never thought I would be able to overcome the addiction. But something happened that morning six years ago. Just about to go out to buy more cigarettes, out of the blue, I said to myself, "You are now a nonsmoker." I did not say, "It's been two minutes since you quit." I was at that very moment, and with the help of God, a nonsmoker. Although I did fall off the wagon at my brother's oyster scald on that bitterly cold New Year's Eve following my big decision and sank so low at one point during what turned out to be a sad and never-ending January that I ate a box of Krispy Kreme sugar-glazed doughnuts while sitting in front of my kerosene heater, I have remained relatively thin

and smoke-free to this day.

But I am a reformed smoker who does not rant and rave against tobacco, tobacco growers, or the industry in the manner of today's politicians. Admittedly, I am not objective concerning this particular subject. After all, I am the granddaughter of a man who was said to have raised some of the prettiest tobacco in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The tobacco-growing culture which shaped me is a part of my Southern heritage, and I recognize that the vestiges of a tobacco-based economy link Maryland with the rest of the tidewater South even as carpetbaggers from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York stream over the Mason-Dixon. As old Maryland disappears, what is most disturbing is that people, including the majority of Marylanders, are pitifully unschooled in the state's geography and history. They might not know, for example, that while cotton and other crops have been raised here, tobacco has always been king in Maryland. Nevertheless, while I am one nonsmoking Marylander with a warm spot in her heart for all that tobacco represents, I am glad to be free from the cigarette habit.

As a nonsmoker, I enjoy many benefits. I feel and look better, spend less money, and my clothes and hair smell sweeter. I'll never have to go out in the middle of a snowstorm to buy cigarettes as I did one winter or experience the disappointment every smoker feels when he discovers there is only one left in the pack. Smokers, who are resourceful people, must always plan ahead for mornings, for hurricanes, for blizzards. No one, the smoker reasons, should have to get out of bed, especially on a Monday morning, and have that first cup of coffee without the accompaniment of a cigarette. Unlike the smoker, I don't have to fret about the future as much now.

Inconsistent with my relatively newfound freedom from nicotine is a tolerant attitude toward the addicted. Oddly enough, I don't care if I sit in the nonsmoking section of a restaurant. In fact, my favorite cafe, located in Lusby, Maryland, to my knowledge, has no policy of segregating smokers from nonsmokers, but does have the best fatback-seasoned string beans I have ever tasted. Furthermore, people might consider me strange because I believe that there is nothing as rude as a hostess who invites people to her home and then asks guests to smoke outside. I can't imagine a Christmas

Day on which nonsmoking kinfolk, cups of Virginia eggnog in their hands, look out frosty windows at some poor soul puffing away and sitting at the picnic table in the backyard. What a violation of the rules of hospitality.

When I first quit, I was afraid I wouldn't know how to act around the nicotine addicts in my life. My best friend in the world is a Kentucky girl and a smoker. I wondered how she would react to me as one of those holier-than-thou health nuts? Fortunately, everything has worked out for our friendship. I have discovered that I am as tolerant or as intolerant as I was in the old days when I inhaled. Even before I quit, a very heavy concentration of smoke, such as I once experienced in an Amtrak car filled with chain-smoking Japanese tourists on their way to Philadelphia, would make me sick. Otherwise, a little smoke here and there is no problem for me. I can still sit at the kitchen table with a smoking friend talking and drinking coffee for hours.

Truthfully, sometimes fellow nonsmokers get on my nerves a little. They are often overly precise and tend to complain of allergic reactions to smoke. Why can't they just say they don't like smoking rather than coming up with ailments? Reformed smokers, in particular, can be tedious in their enthusiasm. They can detect a puff of smoke from 50 feet away and are offended by even the slightest suggestion of fumes. While I believe that smokers have a responsibility, as we all do, to consider others as much as possible, some nonsmokers, typical of many people these days, want a perfect world and think that they will live forever if they just avoid or eliminate all perceived threats to their health.

The truth is that no matter how judiciously we live, we are all going to die. It's just a matter of when. And some of us can do all the wrong things and still manage to live a long time. My grandmother, Madeleine, who died at the age of 100 and who was happy and healthy almost to the end, lived with heavy smokers for at least 40 years of her life and broke all the nutrition rules (Granny would fry oyster fritters in lard and then butter them). Who knows exactly what combination of factors determine how long we will live?

What I do know is that my grandmother did not make staying alive the focus of her life; she just lived with purpose and left the rest to God, not to a Presi-

dent with a vendetta against R.J. Reynolds and other free enterprisers. My purpose is not yet apparent to me, but has something to do with history and politics. I am addicted to historical non-fiction and neglect housework and other responsibilities to read. And since I quit smoking, I have come out of the closet. I am now proud to call myself a conservative. There is no correlation that I can see between not smoking and becoming a conservative. Discovering my true political nature was simply a matter of time. Quitting smoking just coincided with my emergence as a meanspirited right-winger who thinks the tobacco companies should be left alone even if it is trendy to pick on these evil corporate interests. Inevitably, my traditional conservative inclinations hidden all these years have surfaced because I have grown older and wiser and have actually taken a moment to read the Constitution. As it turns out, I was destined to give up sophomoric liberal views along with my other bad habit. I am glad on both counts because life gets interesting after you go cold turkey.

Joyce L. Bennett writes from Leonardtown, Maryland.

LITERATURE

John O'Hara and American Conservatism

by Ralph de Toledano

In 1941, Edmund Wilson published a small book of pieces about several contemporary writers, tied together under the title, *The Boys in the Back Room*. It was a typical Wilsonian production—insightful, wrongheaded, and regal—synthesizing as “Hollywood writers” James M. Cain, William Saroyan, John Steinbeck, and others now forgotten, along with John O'Hara. That this linkage was gratuitous and artificial was based almost exclusively on the single fact that these writers had spent some time moiling in the Hollywood studios. Only Cain had any significant relation-

ship with films and their makers, and John O'Hara very little, though two novels, *Hope of Heaven* and *The Big Laugh*, dealt with the Hollywood scene. To so categorize him was equivalent to calling Ernest Hemingway a Spanish product because of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or the scenes in Spain in *The Sun Also Rises*.

John O'Hara's intellectual and emotional roots were East Coast throughout. He had been a newspaperman in New York, his short stories appeared mostly in the *New Yorker*, and the locale of his writings ranged from Gibbstown, the Pennsylvania city he created, to the Ivy League colleges, to a New York milieu—with their polloi/aristoi, their sights and sounds and smells. He was a jazz buff, but of the strictly Eastern conviction—that is, of the jazz that thrived in Manhattan's *boites*.

O'Hara burst on the literary scene with *Appointment in Samarra*, a novel which had the editing of Charles A. Pearce at Harcourt, Brace—the best O'Hara ever received because it was so light the pencil never appeared. The charge of “Hemingway influence” was immediately made by the critics—true only insofar as any serious novelist at the time paid a debt to Hemingway. That influence was only to a very small degree stylistic. For Hemingway was, for all his “realism” and occasional brutality, a romantic—involved with his plots and his characters, living and suffering with them. His romanticism, particularly in his view of women, was basically adolescent, as were his political views. For Hemingway, an orgasm could make the earth shake, whereas O'Hara could write of sex that “it's better with your shoes off.”

The Hemingway influence, seemingly, was to write it clean—what made O'Hara turn away from Proust as “heavy, dull, overrated, and sometimes ludicrous,” a judgment he might have tempered had he read the *Temps Perdu* in French. But with the publication of *Butterfield 8*, O'Hara's second novel, no one could reasonably mark him as Hemingwayan. The novels that followed ratified this point. And the disparity in styles and approach was even greater in the short stories. For nowhere did O'Hara display Hemingway's call on *machismo*, the in-turned emotionalism, or the compulsion to muscle-flexing. O'Hara had the highest respect for Hemingway as a writer, though not so much as a person,

but that respect did not move him into Hemingway's *genre*.

O'Hara was always an observer and a depicter—aloof, sometimes slightly superior, and seldom judgmental in probing the social and cultural scene and the motivation, speech, and attitude of those on whom he focused. There is almost no relationship between the violence and high drama of Hemingway's world and O'Hara's upwardly and downwardly mobile middle-class with its upper-class pretensions. He wrote with an objectivity and *irony* in its classical definition that you find in Balzac—and his novels, short stories, and other pieces are a continuous flow of an America-style *comédie humaine*, akin to Balzac's gallic *oeuvre*. No single O'Hara novel or short story can be judged alone. They are all part of a *gestalt*, a broader and inclusive picture and hard to sort out—*Ten North Frederick*, *A Rage to Live* (which it was said he wrote as a vehicle for Joan Crawford), *The Lockwood Concern*, or *From the Terrace*.

“I write fast, and do not rewrite, so why pretend,” he wrote in a letter—and the collection of his letters which was published in 1978 is a far better guide to his thinking and his achievement than anything written by his critics. But this was not an accurate statement, for John O'Hara was one of those writers who edits as he goes along, emending, modifying, and deleting—a gift bestowed on the better newspaper-trained writers. He had a sense of typography, of blocking out a paragraph so that it would make his point without directional arrows. And he was a master of indirect character delineation. Of a character in *A Rage to Live*, one of his more extended and allegedly “commercial” novels, he could write with justice, “At no time do I, the novelist, enter her mind. At no time am I the omniscient, ubiquitous novelist. The God.” That takes a high form of craftsmanship.

For those of us who have had the fortune or misfortune of being writers—writers as more than those who sit down at the typewriter to turn out a best-seller and win a Pulitzer—John O'Hara moves us as one who never took his *métier* for granted. He was a *serieux* who not only worked at his craft but examined both it and himself *à tout vent*. Edmund Wilson and others hold forth on O'Hara's way of inserting long passages into, say, *Appointment in Samarra* or *Hope of Heaven* about a minor character who