

FOOD FOR THOUGHT 11 (PART THREE):

OUR ENEMIES, OURSELVES

ONE

There's another thing, before we leave it, that needs to be observed about the unspeakably grim and haunting segment from http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/002-9518450-2508028?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=A+Writer+at+War&Go.x=11&Go.y=7 *A Writer at War* that I quoted in <http://www.ericlarsen.net/foodforthought11.2.html> Part Two. As for that entire book, I must add, it's hard to imagine anything recommend more highly for the reader who might want to learn more, from narratives based on eyewitness experience, about the suffering and courage demanded of and shown by the Red Army on the Eastern Front. In addition, even though they're not based on *immediate* eyewitness experience, Antony Beevor creates a vividness and intensity easily the equivalent of Grossman's in his famous pair of extraordinary books on the period, <http://www.fetchbook.info/compare.do?search=0140284583> *Stalingrad, The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* and <http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?sts=t&an=Antony+Beevor&y=12&tn=1945+The+Fall+of+Berlin&x=62> *The Fall of Berlin 1945*. And, on *that* subject, the eyewitness account given in diary form by "Anonymous" in <http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?sts=t&an=Anonymous&y=11&tn=A+Woman+in+Berlin&x=49> *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City* gives a personal immediacy and detail not likely to be forgotten by any who read it.

And exactly why is it that I'm talking about all these books? Well, for one thing, I happen to have been *reading* them in the past handful of years—let's say, as it happens, over the past *six* years, a period, under the Bushiscti, when it hasn't been a far-fetched

notion that the morning newspaper might almost daily bring a person to thoughts of WWII in Europe.

The truth is, after all, that the United States today, of all nations of the world, is the one most like Nazi Germany. Evidence can be seen in the nation's use of massive and relentlessly applied propaganda not only throughout its state-controlled mainstream media but from the highest levels of government itself. More evidence can be seen in the country's habitual seizing of domestic power extra-legally, or by fiat, or simply by breaking the law and defying punishment. It can be seen in a so-called "foreign policy" that includes the military invasion of sovereign states with no *casus belli* or legal basis, but *with* outright lies, distortions, and breakings of other attendant laws. It can be seen in the country's abandonment of habeas corpus, and in its detainment of "enemies" without charge, without right of appeal, and without any time-limit on their imprisonment. It can be seen in the country's ever-routine but now fully legalized use of torture and brutality; in its perpetration of murder, sometimes *through* torture and at other times by assassination, of people who, say, come to be considered adversaries of or threats to the capitalist-corporate state generally (Salvador Allende, for example) or of those, say, who come to be deemed a threat to one or another bloc of power *inside* the state (Paul Wellstone, for example. Any who doubt that Senator Wellstone was assassinated should take a close look at the scholarship of Jim Fetzer and Four Arrows in <http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=568036608&searchurl=sts%3Dt%26an%3DJim%2BFetzer%2Band%2BFour%2BArrows%26y%3D0%26tn%3DAmerican%2BA%26x%3D0%26sortby%3D2> *American Assassination: The Strange Death of Senator Paul Wellstone*).

I suppose at this point there may still be readers—I have no idea how many—who with varying degrees of intensity will object to what I've just been saying. Some may mildly disagree, some more strongly, some vociferously. It's possible that among them could be someone arguing like this against the validity of what I've been saying: "But *that's not true*. There's *no way* that the United States in 2006 is anywhere *near* what Nazi Germany was like in 1933, or 1939, or 1942. You don't know what you're talking about. You're being irresponsible, sensationalistic, and purposely hyperbolic. In fact—and you call yourself a *writer*—the truth is that you're being *dishonest*."

And therefore a word is necessary in my defense. And, in assembling that defense, I want to do two simultaneous things. For one, I, too, want to examine whether what I've said actually is or isn't true, and in what way or ways. Maybe there's a greater truth than I've seen, maybe a lesser, or conceivably none. And, second, I want to examine what the motivation would or could actually be for someone—in response to my saying what I said—to accuse me of being wrong, irresponsible, and dishonest.



The first thing to do, it seems to me, is to look closely at what I did say, and then to consider just as carefully what I *didn't* say. I didn't say that the United States *is* Nazi Germany, and neither—to speak precisely—did I say that the United States *is like* Nazi

Germany. I did make the more qualified assertion that “the United States today, of all nations of the world is the one that’s *most like* Nazi Germany” (emphasis added, by me).

Now let *me* ask: What’s wrong, irresponsible, and dishonest about *that*? The evidence I gave is well and widely known, isn’t it? In fact, for anyone who has looked into even *some* part of the large body of 9/11 scholarship that’s been published in the past five years will know how comparatively mild, modest, and understated my assertions about the U.S. today actually are. I’ll grant in a nano-second that one good excuse for a person’s having missed this scholarship is that *none* of it has been reviewed in or by the mainstream media, print or otherwise—the “mainstream” media that I’ll identify from now on as the “gatekeeper-media.” As for my own words about the US, anyone who still does in fact consider them intemperate or excessive might find both a primer to the general subject of American world behavior *and* an antidote to their discontent with me by turning to a much, much older book than the recent 9/11 works. And *that* book is <http://www.fetchbook.info/compare.do?search=0393304930> *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, a genuinely powerful *cri de coeur* by the widely renowned scholar and American historian, the late http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Appleman_Williams William Appleman Williams.

And when was *his* book published? Answer: *all the way back in 1959!*

More than forty-five years ago. In light of so long a history of the tragedy of American rapaciousness, greed, and usurpation abroad, the things that I said are hardly much of anything. Sadly, what *I* said is a truism.



Nevertheless, the making of comparisons—even qualified ones—between the US and Nazi Germany needs still more analysis, as does the question of what it is that might motivate people to *object* to the making of such comparisons.

What needs to be studied is the validity of such comparisons. After all, the person objecting to my comments could in all accuracy give me the retort that the Nazis, after all, had committed crimes—for the moment let’s stick just to murder and torture—on a scale *far, far* greater than any scale the US has committed them on. As a consequence, I’m obviously wrong in making a comparison between the two.

Well. That person’s objection brings up an important question—and that has to do with the idea of *validity* of something being determined on the basis of its *extensiveness*. This is a tricky but immeasurably important matter. It’s also one that can get a person (like me, say) into a lot of trouble, *especially* in an age of political correctness—which is to say, an age of simplification.

In my teaching days, as readers of <http://www.fetchbook.info/compare.do?search=1593760981> *A Nation Gone Blind* know, the subject of tragedy came up at least once a year, not so much when my students and I

were reading Shakespeare, but certainly when we were taking on the Greek tragedians. And here's something I used to do. *After* having warned my classes all semester *not* to fall for intentionally fallacious "either/or" questions that I or anyone else might ask them ("Which do you put on your eggs in the morning, salt or pepper?"), I often proposed exactly that kind of question about what's "tragic." I did this, first, to see whether my charges were on their toes and would denounce the question as fallacious (my infamous <http://www.ericlarsen.net/foodforthought1.html> one percent would see through it; the rest would fall for it) and, second, to hear what they'd answer. The question was simple. I'd ask something along these lines: "Which of these is tragic: when a lone Alpine shepherd dies from a lightning strike, or when four thousand Alpine villagers die in sudden avalanches released by a lightning strike?"

You can easily imagine the choice made by my faithful 99%—*and* the basis for their choice. That basis, of course, was *numerical*, or, to use my earlier word, the basis was *extensiveness*. One death is a death, four thousand deaths are tragic. This isn't the place to talk about what tragedy and the tragic *really* are, although readers interested in that question can go—or return, I add wishfully—to the third chapter of <http://www.fetchbook.info/compare.do?search=1593760981> *A Nation Gone Blind* with its discussion of *Oedipus the King*. The point right now, though, is to analyze the fallacy that comes from identifying *meaning* as being a matter of *extent*.

That third chapter of *A Nation Gone Blind* is called "Consumerism, Victimology, and the Disappearance of the Meaningful Self," and only those who don't know or who have *lost* that idea or understanding—the idea or understanding of what the meaningful self *is*—only *they* will confuse meaning with extensiveness, and only *they* will be inclined to consider the single shepherd's death to be "non-tragic" or "less tragic" and the death of four thousand to be "tragic." In *A Nation Gone Blind* I wrote about "the individual and irreducible self, the eye, if you will, of the mind" (p. 134), and that phrase gets close to the idea again here: Each self is a universe; each self is *the* universe. With the shepherd's death, the universe ended. With the death of the four thousand, the universe ended.

One of the great *literary* expressions of this idea (along with *Hamlet*) is William Butler Yeats' <http://www.online-literature.com/yeats/777/> "Lapis Lazuli." Written in 1938, when WWII seemed increasingly inevitable, the poem speaks out against the implied claim that under threat of war, the arts fall into insignificance ("I have heard that hysterical women say / They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow, / Of poets that are always gay"), the only things of meaning or merit in the face of war becoming defense-building and life-saving, *not* the preciousness and affectation of making *art*.

To this argument, Yeats makes one of the world's most eloquent demurrals, declaring that even if the entire world were coming to an end, art—the arts—would lose not a smidgen in importance or value:

All perform their tragic play,
There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,

That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
 Yet they, should the last scene be there,
 The great stage curtain about to drop,
 If worthy their prominent part in the play,
 Do not break up their lines to weep.

And why *don't* they “break up their lines to weep?” Well, because they know that art—the creating of significant things—is the *only means human beings have* to stave off, and possibly even conquer, meaninglessness. Yeats' next two lines suffer from the wholesale change in the meaning of “gay” or “gaiety” between 1938 and now, and, even back when he wrote the lines, the poet was putting a tremendously heavy interpretive weight on the word, which stands here for that very impulse in humans—like Lily Briscoe's “attempt at something” in *To the Lighthouse*—that both allows and causes them *to create meaning, at any cost, in the face of a surrounding nothingness and meaninglessness*. The actors, then, don't “break up their lines to weep” because only in and through art is there meaning:

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
 Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

Then, in its very next lines, the poem turns to the subject of the *self* that we're concerned with here: The single, lone, isolated self, the *meaningful* self that, with Yeats, I agree as being not only “the eye of the mind” but as being, also, the universe. Here, then, are the great, great lines:

All men have aimed at, found and lost;
 Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
 Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
 Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
 And all the drop-scenes drop at once
 Upon a hundred thousand stages,
 It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

Everyone has striven in some way, and everyone has, even if after success, in the end, “lost,” which we can take as meaning that *everyone has died*, and, if they haven't, they will. And what *is* this loss, this death? It's the disappearance of *all*—“Black out.” True, Yeats immediately seems to contradict himself, and I don't know why. From “Black,” though, he goes straight to some kind of *light* that's “blazing into the head,” then goes even farther by suggesting—*saying*—that this “blaze” is “Heaven.” Maybe he wanted to leave the door open for both believers and non-believers, though the notion of the mighty Yeats waffling isn't one I'm especially familiar with. You'll have to count me out on this one, though if somebody has a good idea, I hope they'll <mailto:ericlarsen@ericlarsen.net> let me know.

Still, that question isn't our central concern right now. *That* concern lies in the subsequent lines, beginning with “Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.” And the meaning? What *is* the “uttermost” that tragedy can reach? The answer: Death. The loss of *everything*. And that death is sole, lone, individual, unitary, irreducible, un-sharable, and absolutely incommunicable to any other being of any kind whatsoever or in any way

whatsoever. This is the disappearance of the “the individual and irreducible self,” the disappearance of “the eye. . . of the mind.”

And, because of this isolation of each irreducible, meaningful self from any *other* self, and *certainly* because of the impossibility of the self’s death being *shared* with any other self, the enormous and enormously meaningful conclusion must be reached:

Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop-scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

“It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.” But what *is* “it,” this thing that “cannot grow by an inch or an ounce”? There’s only one possible answer, only one possible grammatical antecedent for that little pronoun—and so we conclude that “it” is tragedy.

Back now to my students again, and to the admittedly trick question about one dying or four thousand dying. *In this sense*—in the Yeatsian sense, the Homeric sense, the Sophoclean and Shakespearean and Virginia Woolfian and Samuel Beckettian sense—in *this sense*, where it’s believed and assumed that *life is all there* is and that life *can be contained only within the single, irreducible, isolate self*—in *this sense*, between one dying and four thousand dying there is *no difference in meaning whatsoever*.

It’s probable enough, I suppose, that words like these may be met with *some* howls of objection. But just consider two things. If one universe or four thousand universes are snuffed out, what difference? *That’s* the question. And *please*, any among you who may be howlers, please take note as well that although I’ve said plenty about “meaning” or “meaningfulness,” I’ve said *nothing at all* about pathos, horror, ghastliness, sadism, ruthlessness, the diabolical, the unfeeling, the perverse, the criminal, the monstrous, or the insane. *These* are words that will be needed when we consider and study the *killers*, not, as we’re doing now, when we analyze the meaning of the *killed*.

And so, for the moment, this is where we’re left: Looking at the Bushisctis’ torture of *some* prisoners as opposed to the Nazis’ torture of hundreds upon hundreds of thousands; the Bushisctis’ murder of *some* victims as opposed to the Nazi’s murder of millions and millions and millions. And the conclusion is this: These differences *must* be seen as differences of *extensiveness*, of *extent*, and *not* as differences in *meaning* or *of* meaning.

The Bushiscti, therefore, the men and women of the Bush administration who stand and serve as our own national leaders, are—in the pure, Yeatsian sense that this discussion is couched in—*every bit as guilty as Hitler and the Nazis* were guilty. The difference between the Bushiscti and the Nazis is this alone: That the crimes of the former are—as of now—less *extensive* than were the crimes of the latter. In every other way, they are identical.

The consequences of this fact in regard to judgment—the consequences in regard *justice*—are obvious.

TWO

On the day before the recent midterm election, Gore Vidal was interviewed by Robert Scheer on <http://www.truthdig.com/> truthdig.com. Anyone who'd like to listen to the interview or have a look at the video can click http://www.truthdig.com/avbooth/item/20061105_gore_vidal_the_most_important_election_in_my_lifetime/ here. But I can also synopsise. Vidal declared that “We’re facing the most important election in my lifetime,” a lifetime, he quickly added in his usual droll way, that “does not quite extend back to that of Abraham Lincoln, but it’s pretty close.” For those who want to save some time by *not* watching the interview, I’ll copy out here a few lines of it that are central to what we’re talking about now:

So, my fellow countrymen, as I sit here, not yet at Gettysburg, I have a notion that this is the most important vote that you’ll probably ever cast. Because should this gang of thugs continue in the two houses of Congress, there isn’t any chance of getting the Constitution back. . .

This is the last chance, really, by getting some new chairpersons to head committees in the House. . . to have a clean sweep, which, in normal times, if we’d ever enjoyed them, would have happened by now. Now it has got to happen, or welcome to the Third Reich.

Along with the near-universal error of equating the *extent* of things with the *significance* of them, Americans in general—*especially* so now in the age of television—seem to *insist*—as if doing so were a divine law—upon living their lives inside of densely woven and suffocating cocoons of euphemism and *niceness* (and perhaps also of certain kinds of *naïveté* and *trust*—more to be said later). In *A Nation Gone Blind*, I argue that people have been tricked, trained, de-educated, and indoctrinated into “seeing” things only at certain degrees of pre-packaged, as it were, abstractness, so that in effect they can’t any longer “see” what’s *really* real but can “see” only what’s already at a pre-formed level of abstraction. That’s why, in academia, publishing, and among writers, “thought-categories” replace real thought, with the result that people *think* they’re thinking only when and if they “think” in the dreadful and deadening pre-fabricated categories—sort of like rooms in the mind, all without windows but stuffed with “furniture”—of race, class, gender, ethnic identity, and so on.

Now, just consider what happens when possessors of *that* kind and degree of blindness debilitate themselves further by putting on the additionally vision-inhibiting dark glasses of euphemism, niceness—let’s go ahead and list all four—naïveté, and *trust*.

Well, what you get then is a people who are *not capable*, first, of *seeing* things for what they are, and who are *not capable*, second, of *naming* them for what they are.

And that's why Gore Vidal, for all his irritating mannerisms and his ultra-dependence on the gossipy, is nevertheless not only *so rare* among living American writers but in addition *so extraordinarily valuable*. Here we are, after all, living under a political leadership *so vile, so depraved, so corrupt, so malicious, so unscrupulous, so criminal, so traitorous, and so self-interested* that it can actually hijack *four* airplanes (at minimum), bring down *three* World Trade Center towers with thousands of people in two of them, fly *something* into the Pentagon, *shoot* down flight 93, and do who knows *what* with flight 77, all the while keeping military air defenses either at stand-down or in a state of hopeless ineffectiveness and confusion—here we are, living under a political leadership that can either *do* these things or *have* them done—or at the very, very, very least, *allow* them to *be* done, and that can then, most incredible of all these incredible things, *keep the whole entire thing sufficiently a secret from a sufficient number of people for a sufficient length of time so they can actually get away with it.*

And? Well, at least, at *least*, at the *very, very least*, we've still got Gore Vidal, one of the remaining few figures of influence who can *see* what's there to be *seen*, who can *think* what's there to be *thought*, and who can summon up the courage to tell the truth in words that are themselves also true, who can *name* our leaders for what they *are*—“this gang of thugs”—and, further, who can *name*, too, for what it is, this monstrous thing that they have set out to create, to foist upon us, and to keep forever: In short, says Vidal, it's “the Third Reich,” and, if nothing be done, we'll be “welcome to it.”

THREE

How can we *possibly* stand “any chance of getting the Constitution back” if we can't even *see* that it's been stolen? How can we possibly stand “any chance of getting the Constitution back” if we can't even name the words or *use* the words that alone can express what's at work and *what has been* at work in the stealing of it—words like criminality, thuggery, cold-bloodedness, murder, assassination, and treason? And, last, how can we possibly stand “any chance of getting the Constitution back” if we can't even *see* the word, can't even *imagine* the word, can't even *name* the word, and, most important of all can't even *use* the word to identify and name the thing that has already replaced the Constitution?

How can we?

The word, of course, is fascism. I can understand perfectly well why *no one* wants to say the word. I *myself* don't want to say it, I don't want to *have* to say it, I don't so much as want to *hear* the ugly, dread *sound* of it. But that's no excuse not to do it. America is in danger greater than any it's been in since the Civil War—if I could, I would ask Gore Vidal, the Constitutional historian, whether he agrees. This danger is like a disease, and in fact *is* a disease. In order to be cured, any disease first must be diagnosed—that is to say, it must be identified correctly and *named* for what it is—in no other way can the *appropriate* treatment be applied to it. Now, consider this: Any *doctor*

who *did see* a disease but *refused* to name it or couldn't bear to, this inability *or* refusal resulting either in *no* treatment or in *incorrect* treatment—any doctor who behaved in this way, with such behavior resulting in the death of the patient, any such doctor would become a murderer, or *at the very least* would be in breach of the Hippocratic oath.

And doesn't the analogy apply equally to the health of the republic, to the disease of fascism that's consuming it, or *beginning* to consume it? Unnamed, this disease cannot be seen. And unseen, it cannot be named. And yet nevertheless, somehow, whatever the cost, it must be both: It must be *seen*, and it must be *named*.

Words are powerful, but in order to *be* powerful, they must be used. And in order to be used in ways that are *real*, they must be based on thinking. And for thinking to be correct, *it* must be based on *seeing*.

Readers will remember back in “Food for Thought 8” when, in mentioning Barrie Zwicker's extraordinary new book http://www.amazon.com/Towers-Deception-Media-Cover-up-11/dp/0865715734/sr=1-1/qid=1163430922/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/002-9518450-2508028?ie=UTF8&s=books, *Towers of Deception*, I also cited Zwicker's own citation of the famous quote from George Orwell: “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

And the corollary? *Lying* about the truth either through commission or omission, covering the truth *up*, refusing to *see* the truth in “a time of universal deceit”—a time, that is, like our own—to do any of these things must then, by Orwell's logic, be not revolutionary but *reactionary* acts. And today, now, what those reactionary acts do, what they will do, and if unchanged what they will *continue* to do—whether through people's so deeply *craving* politeness and niceness, possibly through their not being able to *bear* using certain necessary words, or not being able to *believe* that those words could *possibly* pertain to *us*, or to *now*—in these ways these reactionary acts will smooth the way for, will virtually *escort* fascism into our homes and living rooms and offices, and will end up doing more than anything else to aid and abet the losing of our Constitution, for keeps.

And that's why the corporate-controlled “gatekeeper media”—the publishers, the newspapers, the editors and writers and magazines, the columnists, the radio hosts and the television newspeople—that's why they, by denying the truth outright, or serving their masters by keeping the known truth hidden, by ridiculing that truth and by calumniating and smearing those who explore it—these are the reasons why the crimes of the “gatekeepers” are *so* deep, *so* heinous, *so* ruinous—*so* collaborationist—as they are.

And now, at last, in Part Four, we'll turn to them, the gatekeepers.

One thing, however, remains, and that's a brief return to the quotation from http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/002-9518450-2508028?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=A+Writer+at+War&Go.x=11&Go.y=7

A Writer at War in the Food for Thought piece preceding this one. The relevant part is this, the end of the quote:

. . . there are SS men and guards all round, with sub-machine guns, hand grenades and pistols. They are the power. In their hands are tanks and aircraft, lands, cities, the sky, railways, the law, newspapers, radio. The whole world is silent, suppressed, enslaved by a brown gang of bandits which has seized power. London is silent and New York, too. And only somewhere on a bank of the Volga, many thousands of kilometers away, the Soviet artillery is roaring.

There is no hope for those about to die, and yet *there is* hope. The Red Army *is* coming; it *will* come; it *will* defeat the Nazis, even though not for two more years, perhaps longer. “And only somewhere,” writes Grossman, “on a bank of the Volga, many thousands of kilometers away, the Soviet artillery is roaring.”

And just exactly *who*, one cannot help but ask, is coming, from however far away, to save *us*? The answer is, of course, *no one*. We’re alone. We’ve cut ourselves off from the rest of the world. We’re on our own. If any saving is to be done, we’re going to have to do it ourselves.

Eric Larsen
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