

other factions on different points. Ronald Reagan's genius was that he was able to unite, more or less, all of these different groups. But with his passing and the end of the Cold War, keeping this coalition together will not be easy, as the obvious differences between conservatives recently concerning the war in Iraq or over government spending demonstrate. Yet as Nash argues, and I would agree, those who now believe that conservatism is sure to "crack up" and become either a permanent minority or disappear altogether perhaps speak too soon. Conservatism's demise has been predicted often over the past fifty to sixty years. Yet that demise hasn't come. Conservatism remains a "fractious coalition" (334). But don't bet against its survival.

—Kevin Smant

ENTER THE GHOST

Richard M. Reinsch II: *Whittaker Chambers: The Spirit of a Counterrevolutionary*. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010. Pp. xi, 190. \$24.95.)

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Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.

—*Hamlet*, 1.1

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) aims in part to identify traces of Marxist "spirit" that have survived the death of Communism. Whittaker Chambers could have helped him with the task. The argument of Reinsch's book hinges on the soundness, after all, of Chambers's early claim that in rejecting Communism he had chosen the "losing side." For Chambers and Reinsch the modern democratic state, product of the Enlightenment, has moved on a fatal continuum of "isms": rationalism, humanism, secularism, materialism, liberalism, socialism, Communism, so that we all at last live in the House-That-Marx-Built. To the author and his subject a mere retreat before the final stage was no victory. Reinsch calls for an "infusion" of Chambers's "spirit" into what he sees as the moribund body of conservative thought. To this end he draws upon the whole of Chambers's work from *Witness* (1952) to *Cold Friday* (1964), its unfinished, posthumously published sequel, with letters and diary entries. The corpus includes collected journalism, *Ghosts on the Roof* (1989); letters to William F. Buckley Jr., *Odyssey of a Friend* (1987); and correspondence with Ralph de Toledano, *Notes from the Underground* (1997).

A certain bipolarity appears in Chambers's idea of his part in history. He generally placed it on a heroic scale, tragic (Aeschylean) or epic (Dantesque). Jonah, Lazarus, and Samson also figure in his confessional typology. In his darker moods (which were many), it was "all for nothing," the "all" representing in his imagination a merger of the Hiss case with the fate of the West (*Notes*, 246). Reinsch reflects his subject's own grandiosity in claiming that Chambers offered himself "as a sacrifice in redemption of the West's truths." Yet since the end of the Cold War, "the Western consensus has paradoxically held to an essentially Marxist understanding of history" and the moral stagnation of the present age has reduced Chambers's image to that of informer in an old spy drama (2–3).

The facts of the "Case" have received definitive treatment in Allen Weinstein's *Perjury* (Knopf, 1978), and of Chambers's life in a full biography by Sam Tanenhaus (Random House, 1997). Reinsch's purpose is not to rehearse these details but to summon Chambers's spirit, like Banquo's ghost, calling on it to "speak" to the conscience of today's society. The ghost is not silent. Reinsch lets it speak, through Chambers's writings, in a voice liberated from the ordeal of his personal life. Its thesis, first set forth in *Witness*, is that religious faith alone—not economic theory—can deliver the West from what Reinsch calls the "inferno of modernist ideology" (17). Chambers always feared that even by winning the Cold War the Western democracies would merely gain the world and lose their soul. The conservative movement itself, he suspected, had entered into an illicit liaison with rationalism and materialism. He attacked this tendency at its most extreme in a review of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (*Ghosts*). Those who seemed fully to understand his political vision are few enough to constitute a kind of spiritual elect: Buckley and de Toledano are likely candidates; Arthur Koestler, Karl Barth, and Reinhold Niebuhr come close; Henri de Lubac and Dostoevsky are *in*.

As to religion, Reinsch strongly suggests that Chambers, though nominally a Quaker, was spiritually Roman Catholic. The obstruction on his road to Damascus was a mistrust of orthodoxies: he proved unwilling to exchange one for another. Yet the Church, he remarked to Buckley, was the West's "only true counterrevolutionary force" (*Odyssey*, 137–38). Reinsch gilds the lily: "The focus of Chambers' judgment, here, was the Roman Church's position as a bedrock of truth from which the modern might regain his orientation—understanding his nature through spiritual and philosophical meditation" (95). In his "History of Western Culture" for *Life* magazine, Chambers cited Dante, St. Benedict, Thomas Aquinas, and Gothic architecture as evidence that the European Middle Ages had "no unifying principle but God" and expressed a Romantic cultural nostalgia for "sweetness of the medieval mind" (102). Reinsch omits to mention that Chambers, apart from his suspicion of orthodoxies, felt that the Catholic Church belonged after all to "the City of Man, not the City of God" (*Notes*, 314).

Salvation, if attainable at all, depended rather on a more inclusive (and vague) grasp of tradition that "defends and invokes those great truths

which the mind of the West has once for all disclosed" (92). The "conservative position," so defined, stood for Chambers as the only possible counterattack on secular, rationalist modern ideologies. Except for a qualifying endnote (175), Reinsch supports Chambers's straw-dummification of the Enlightenment, twice referring to its modern heirs as "illuminati," as if to link liberals in general to a pop-culture conspiracy fiction. The Illuminati, founded in 1776, called themselves "Perfectibilists," whose goal played into Reinsch's highly selective view of the adversary: "Man, who had been seemingly liberated in the modern era, found himself mistaken about his true end. His singular greatness ... sought to will perfectionist aims into existence," or, in a memorable phrase minted by Eric Voegelin and circulated by Buckley, to "immanentize the eschaton" (106).

In both Reinsch and Chambers, references to the great figures of the Enlightenment are rare and, where they appear, inconsequential. The reader is left to derive an identity for the modernist demiurge from assertions such as the following:

- "The rejection of the traditional Western vision of man under God inevitably provided the opportunity to believe that man's mind could determine man's destiny" (33).
- "In an era that has eclipsed the sovereignty of God and transferred a total self-sovereignty to the individual, man moves beyond the limits of his nature and his humanity" (81).
- "It would be pointless to reject Communism as a political force, but not the modern mind of Enlightenment rationalism [which] 'denies the soul in the name of the mind'" (82–83).
- "It is the vision of man's mind displacing God as the creative intelligence of the world" (145).

The model, in short, for the "demonic" spirit of the age comes not from history but from poetry—Satan's manifesto: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (*Paradise Lost*, 1.254–55).

In "The Devil," a sketch for *Life* (1948), the eponymous stranger supplies Chambers with the prototype for the totalitarian regimes toward which all secular ideologies are impelled: "I possess the will to create ... but I am incapable of creating. ... My greatest masterpiece is never more than a perversion—an ingenious disordering of Another's grand design" (*Ghosts*, 175; see Reinsch, 79).

It will prove no surprise that Chambers as a modern conservative should have woven one strand of Enlightenment thought into his own design. The exception can be understood as an attitude shared with C. S. Lewis (*The Abolition of Man*) toward the "omnicompetent state"—the appropriation by secular, technocratic society of an "omni-" that belongs only to God (and to the narrators of many fictions). In his "History of Western Culture"

Chambers accepted classical liberalism as the deliverer of “business” from a dated orthodoxy (*Ghosts*, 221). As a “man of the Right,” he endorsed, with reservations, “capitalism in its American version” (115). In the late fifties he argued for certain concessions to the New-Dealized temper of the time. Reinsch, who notes this shift from the “Manichean” absolutes of *Witness* (106), seems in his own voice less conciliatory, attacking “progressive taxation, centralized solutions to economic growth,” and Social Security, product of “a political vision ... obviously not [in] the Founders’ Constitution” (46, 138).

A final note might bear the title “A Stream of Solecisms.” Reinsch has attempted to place Chambers in the line of modern conservative thought that includes Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and Russell Kirk, but in a style that consistently turns a reviewer’s response into that of a composition instructor. Even a secular humanist will conclude that the Conservative Mind deserves a more lucid advocate than Reinsch—and a more temperate representative than Chambers.

—James Walton

CULTURAL SECESSION

Michael T. Bernath: *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Pp. xi, 412. \$39.95.)

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In *Confederate Minds*, Michael T. Bernath recounts the activities of Confederate “cultural nationalists” who worked to create an independent Southern literary and educational tradition during the years of the Civil War. According to Bernath, this group of Southern editors, writers, and educators self-consciously promoted the Confederate nation-building effort by severing venues for Southern intellectual expression from Northern influence and producing work that had a uniquely Southern point of view. Southern cultural nationalists saw their effort as central not only in legitimizing secession and promoting the effort to establish a Confederate nation but also in defining what the nation would be for the future.

Using sources that have recently become more accessible to scholars as a result of digitization and microfilm, Bernath bases his study on the newspapers, journals, books, and educational materials that Southerners produced throughout the Civil War years. The content of these materials, however, is not the central concern of the book. Bernath is more interested in exploring