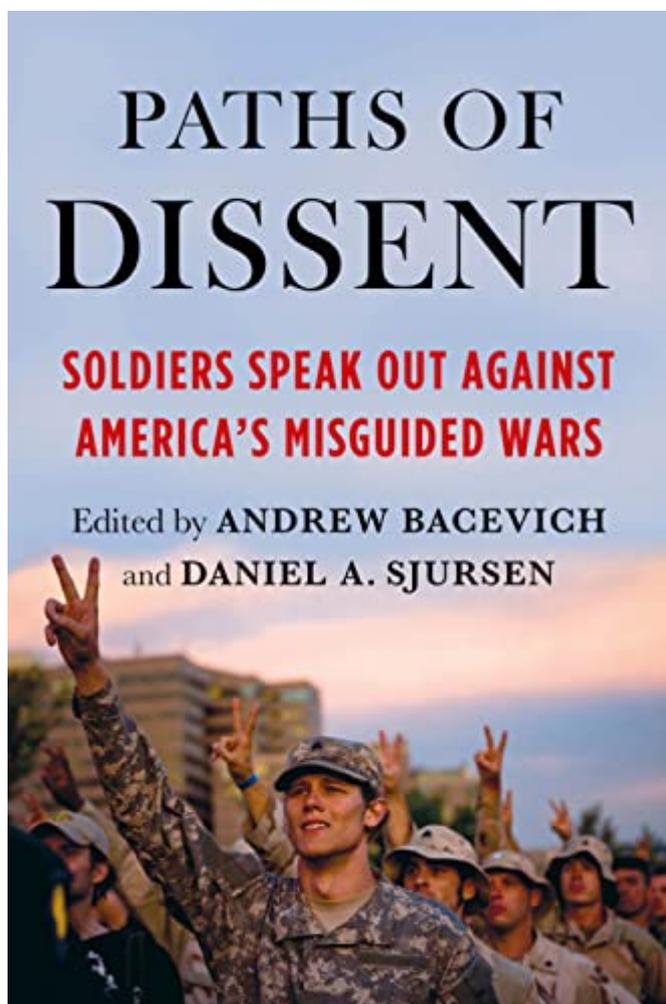


# Peter Molin's Strike Through the Mask!: A Review of Andrew Bacevich's "Paths of Dissent"



What did you do if you were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan and believed the wars you volunteered to fight were unethical or badly managed? Keep quiet and perform your duties as best you could? Take your concerns to the chain-of-command? Express your reservations privately to friends and family? Protest publicly by writing a congressman or news outlet? Or, wait until you were out of service to tell the world about your misgivings?

In *Paths of Dissent: Soldiers Speak Out Against America's Misguided Wars* (2022), editors Andrew Bacevich and Daniel A.

Sjursen invite fourteen veterans of the Global War on Terror to describe acts of public protest they made while still serving or in the years afterward. The contributors describe the events that led them to protest and explore the consequences of their actions. They also reflect on the shape dissent has taken in the post-9/11 contemporary political and cultural climate.

Contributors include field-grade officers, junior officers, and enlisted service members; former non-commissioned officers are notably absent. Army and Marine voices dominate, with only Jonathan Hutto representing the Navy and no former Air Force or Coast Guard personnel featured. Hutto is the lone African-American voice, and Joy Damiani's the sole woman, while Buddhika Jayamaha's contribution illustrates the multi-cultural make-up of America's post-9/11 military. Arguably the most-well known contributors are National Football League star and Army Ranger Pat Tillman's brother Kevin and Army veteran-author Roy Scranton. In many cases, the contributors' acts-of-protest were letters written to influential decision-makers in Washington or opinion-pieces published in the *New York Times* or other high-brow journalistic outlets. Others were published in military venues such as the *Armed Forces Journal*, or in book form. Contributors often describe brief moments of mainstream news notoriety, but curiously, the Internet as an outlet for protest or as a possible galvanizer of public outrage is rarely mentioned. Only a few authors report actively participating in public protests or anti-war organizations.

The lack of a vibrant antiwar movement is foregrounded in Andrew Bacevich's introduction, as Bacevich, a retired colonel, came-of-age in the Vietnam era. That war's glaring sins and mistakes, as well as the ensuing public demonstrations, are on his mind: "In fact, from its very earliest stages until its mortifying conclusion, America's war in Vietnam was a crime." The implication, then, is that Iraq

and Afghanistan were also crimes, with the additional message being that we have ignorantly repeated Vietnam's mistakes. "...of this we can be certain," Bacevich writes, "rarely has such an excruciating experience yielded such a paltry harvest of learning."

The dismal historical record drives Bacevich to ask contemporary contributors to examine the disconnect between their isolated protests and popular tolerance of the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, marked as they were by torture, wanton killing, disrespect for our allies, helplessness in the face of Improvised Explosive Devices, unresolved debates about policy and strategy, and, most of all, lack of success. The personal narratives that follow Bacevich's introduction are varied and compelling.

For the field grade officers represented, such as Jason Dempsey, Paul Yingling, and Gian Gentile, speaking out against failed policies and tactics came not in the guise of impassioned outcries, but as reasoned analyses in books and thought-pieces aimed at military decision-makers. To a man, they report their ideas and objections fell on deaf ears. Gentile, an Army colonel who served in Baghdad at the height of the surge and subsequently took issue with COIN strategy and its primary proponent General David Petraeus, states it most bluntly: "From what I can tell, [my] seven years of professional military dissent had no impact on the actual US strategy and the conduct of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan." Instead, the failure to conform to repeat the party line brought upon their authors ostracization leading to early-retirement. No one's going to feel too sorry for colonels forced to live on a colonel's retirement pay-and-benefits, but taken together, the essays by this group of authors are savvy about military institutional politics and culture, particularly within the officer corps and especially in regard to its capacity for intellectual honesty and rigor.

The essays by junior officers typically begin by describing the youthful idealism that led the authors to the military, followed by accounts of how their idealism was crushed first in training (or in their educations at West Point or Annapolis), and culminating in scornful howls fomented by battlefield events in Iraq and Afghanistan. Army infantry officer Dan Bershinski describes how losing his legs to a mine in Afghanistan made him a pariah within the infantry corps. Rather than treated as a hero who might speak the truth of combat to officers in training, he was isolated from the junior officers whom he wanted to help become better leaders for fear his words and injuries might bum them out. For Marine Gil Barndollar, two desultory tours in Afghanistan drove home the point that the war was unwinnable, in equal parts due to failed American overarching strategy, the incompetence of the Afghan military, and his own units' risk-averse and uninspired tactics. For Marine Matthew P. Hoh, experiences in Iraq similar to Barndollar's in Afghanistan soured him. For these former officers, the gaping chasm between stated goals and ideals and actual experience of the war was intolerable. The sentiment expressed by Hoh that after leaving the military he vowed "to live a life according to how my mind, soul, and spirit dictate—to be intellectually and morally honest for the remainder of my days"—unites their accounts.

The contributions by junior enlisted service members are the most varied and in many ways the most interesting reflections in *Paths of Dissent*. Often, they recount dutiful performance of duty while in uniform, even by left-leaning and artistically-minded soldiers such as Joy Damiani and Roy Scranton. Airborne paratrooper Buddika Jayamaha reports with almost chagrin and regret an act-of-protest—an article he and squad members composed for the *New York Times*—he undertook while serving in the ranks while in Iraq. Frankly, the sense that the military was a reasonably tolerable institution for young men and women just starting out in life seems to predominate. Only Jonathan W. Hutto's essay describes a

sustained and contentious wrangle with his chain-of-command and the big Navy while in uniform born of miserable terms-of-service. For most of the enlisted authors in *Paths of Dissent*, the real drama takes place after leaving the military. Several accounts report flirtation with anti-war movements. A more common experience is a period of drift and dysfunction as they sorted out their past lives as soldiers with efforts to build meaningful lives afterward. Jayamaha writes, "I had too many choices, and every choice seemed hollow. I had survived the war relatively unscathed, thankful to my colleagues, leaders, and God for saving my dumb ass... But what would be the most meaningful way to spend the rest of my life? How could I be of service again?" Similarly, Roy Scranton writes that "...dissent may need to take form not in words but in deeds: not as yet another public performance of critique but as the solid accomplishment of repair."

The principled literary objections to small-unit practices or big-military policies recorded in *Paths of Dissent* differ from more overt forms of protest, such as refusal to obey orders or demonstration outside the halls of power. There are, however, other ways veterans manifested dissent than by writing letters, disobeying orders, and marching in the streets, which Bacevich and Sjursen seem not inclined to foreground. We might think of the low-boil burn virtually every deployed soldier felt about the wars. It was evident to almost everyone that that victory was far-off as the wars were being imagined and fought. As someone who has read dozens of Global War on Terror soldier memoirs and fictional portrayals, I'm surprised that the truculent dissatisfaction of lower-enlisted soldiers and junior officers surfaces in only a few *Paths of Dissent* accounts. Damiani's essay points to it, as does former-Marine's Vincent Emanuel's; general readers might know this spirit of unruly disobedience best from the sarcastic Terminal Lance cartoon strip.

We might also consider how the national conversations around

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and veteran suicides represented if not direct dissent, then touchstones by which the ill-begotten wars were often measured. In other words, the cries for help broadcast by troubled veterans might be understood as a dissent that had not found the right words for what those cries signified. Only Jonathan W. Hutto's contribution directly references racism as a rationale for dissent; Hutto's unfortunate experience illustrates how large could be the gap between the military's stated ideals and the reality of life in the ranks for people-of-color. Even in Joy Damiani's essay, which wonderfully documents what might be described as an early case of "quiet quitting" to silently register protest, gender inequity and sexual assault and abuse are not explored for the rottenness they all too often exposed at the core of military culture and the war effort. Finally, the idea that alienation generated by disgust with military hypocrisy and incompetence might lead to anti-establishment fervor for President Trump and radical conservative outrage is not considered in *Paths of Dissent*. What might Ashli Babbitt, the Air Force veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan who died storming the Capitol on January 6, 2021 have to say on the matter? Or active-duty Marine Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Scheller, Jr., whose tirade against President Biden for his perceived mishandling of the evacuation of American allies at Hamid Karzai International Airport in August 2021 effectively ended his military career?

So, *Paths of Dissent* leans heavily toward mannered outcries-from-the-left against the American war machine, inspired by conscience, principle, and duty. I like that fine, but the mannered approach also hints at reasons why protest never caught hold with the populace as it did in the Vietnam era. Bacevich and many contributors view the tepid indifference of the American public as structurally facilitated by the all-volunteer military that allowed the populace to safely avoid thinking about the war. Considered from the populace's perspective, the Global War on Terrorism did not exact much of

a cost, and was hazily connected with the fact that there were no more major terrorist attacks on American soil. "Thank You for Your Service" and "Support the Troops" rhetoric was enough to demonstrate care and assuage guilty consciences about not personally doing more to fight "terrorism." Left mostly unspoken was a less-flattering corollary in regard to veteran protest: "Well, what did you expect? You volunteered for it." Even more: "You volunteered for it and were well-compensated for your service." Vets themselves were subject to the force of these sentiments. It's also hard not to think that a significant portion of the American public rationalized that there were plenty of Al Qaeda in Iraq and Taliban in Afghanistan who hated America and wanted to kill American soldiers. To continue to fight them—to not admit defeat—registered as legitimate, whatever the problems that accrued in the process.

Thus civilians, deferring to the military itself to shape and win the wars, did not demand accountability from political leaders, who in turn did not demand accountability from senior military leaders. In the absence of oversight, the military in the field floundered. Units did what they could, which often wasn't much. Soldiers, murky about the big picture, understood missions in terms of tactical proficiency, loyalty to their squads, and body counts of dead Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters. Without clear orders and a winning strategy, soldiers made up their own minds and often took matters into their own hands. Some fought more brutally than policy and circumstance called for, while others turned in lackadaisical efforts that focused on staying safe and doing as little as possible.

While demanding that civilians and civilian leaders listen more carefully to the voices of soldiers, *Paths of Dissent* zeroes in on the military's own culpability for creating the specific conditions that caused soldiers to dissent, as well as its inability to correct those conditions. An overarching message repeated often is that the military was and is

incapable of critiquing or reforming itself. The accounts by field grade officers illustrate that perpetuating the status quo is the imperative that most governs military culture, not winning wars or taking care of soldiers. Even relatively sustained efforts at internal change, such as the pivot to a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, or application of manpower “surges” in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been poorly conceptualized and wracked by group-think and “flavor-of-the-day” thought-processes. A political sphere and populace that either refused to exercise oversight or just didn’t care made the situation even worse. That the whole war enterprise might have been a disgraceful crime, as Bacevich suggests, tugged at the mind of all participants, thus adding layers of denial and self-deception. Given such inadequacy, is it any wonder that junior officers and junior enlisted felt unsupported and unheard?

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*Paths of Dissent* is dedicated to Ian Fishback, the Army special forces officer who took his grievances about the lack of guidance regarding the use of torture while interrogating prisoners in Iraq to the Washington political establishment and media mainstream in 2005. Bacevich reports that he asked Fishback to contribute, but Fishback was too overtaken by the madness that consumed him at the end of his life to author a publishable essay. Bacevich himself is no stranger to dissent; a retired Army colonel himself, he has written books whose titles illustrate his own objections to America’s modern wars: *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (2005), *Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War* (2010), and *The Age of Illusions: How America Squandered Its Cold War Victory* (2020). Co-editor Daniel A. Sjursen is not as well-known, but he’s a retired Army officer who served

in Iraq and Afghanistan and is now associated with the website [Antiwar.com](http://Antiwar.com).

*Paths of Dissent: Soldiers Speak Out Against America's Misguided Wars*. Edited by Andrew Bacevich and Daniel A. Sjursen. Metropolitan-Holt, New York. 2022.

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## **New Poetry by Jehanne Dubrow: “Poem for the Reader Who Said My Poems Were Sentimental and Should Engage in a More Complex Moral Reckoning with U.S. Military Actions”; “Epic War Poem”; “Tyrian Purple,” and “Some Final Notes On Odysseus”**

When the goddess cries out,  
her voice is a mountain against  
the fighting. But the old soldier  
keeps running—war like weather  
in his ears, a summer storm,  
in his pulse the tossing waves.

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# New Fiction from Jane Snyder: “Mandy Schott”



They sent us home from school early because of the snow, just hard little flakes at first.

I didn't look in the garage for Dave's car because it was the time when he'd be at work. I went into the room he shares with my mother, took a five from the pile of change and bills on his dresser. When he said my name, I turned, smiled a dopey smile, took my hand out of my back pocket.

He watched as I put the five back. I told him I'd been looking for his miniature handcuffs tie tack.

Dave's a detective, wears suits. The cuffs on his tie tack work. When I was little and got bored in restaurants, he'd let

me play with them. I'd snap them shut and he'd look down, say, "I see Seth has apprehended a napkin."

He unpinned it from his tie. "Here you go."

I jumped when he reached his hand out, said I was sorry.

"How 'bout that." He sat on the edge of their bed looking at me. "Not the first time you did it."

I wished it would turn out to be the way it usually does with Dave. Nothing.

I guess I'm not cut out to be a hardened criminal, I'd say.

Nope, Dave would agree. Amateur night.

"I won't do it again."

"I hope not." He leaned back, as if intending to lie all the way down, take a little nap before dinner.

I took a step toward the door. "If that's all..."

He sprawled back, looked bored. "I'm good."

I stayed.

He pulled himself up. "Is there something I can do for you, Seth?"

"I'm sorry."

"So you said."

I couldn't think what to say. "You're an awesome stepdad."

The way he looked at me then was scarier than when he caught me.

In my room I googled what you should do if your kid steals.

Talk to them about how they've lost your trust and what

they'll need to do to get it back, serve cheaper food to recoup the financial loss, take them to jail and have the police lock them in a cell so they know what it feels like, post a video of them wearing a sign that says Thief.

I didn't go when my mother called me for dinner.

Dave knocked on my door the way I'd told him to.

"I'm not hungry."

I got up when he opened the door because I didn't want him to see me lying on my stomach, my butt in the air.

He waited for me so I had to walk in front of him.

We watched the snow from the dining room.

My mother said it made her cold, looking at it.

They're predicting 12 to 14 inches, Dave said. The big dump, he called it.

A major transaction, I agreed.

My mother asked what was wrong.

Dave stood, said he was going to shovel. When he walked by me he reached over and tousled my hair. "Seth can fill you in."

He was the one who was mad. Why couldn't he tell her?

He was still in the hall, putting on his boots, when I said what I'd done.

"Why would you even do something like that?"

"I don't know." I thought of his hand on my head, my hair lifted from one place,

dropped to another.

"Oh, honey. You hurt his feelings."

He gives you anything you want, was what I thought she'd say.

"Am I supposed to be grateful?"

"Yes," she said. "Tell him you're sorry."

"I already did."

"Mean it."

Dave had taken my dog Bonnie with him, was showing her a good time, throwing one of her toys for her, still making quick work of the driveway.

He didn't look like someone you could hurt.

I started on the sidewalk away from him. Where I cleared was messy, not clean the way Dave did it.

He doesn't usually have me shovel, tells me to stay inside, keep warm, he needs the exercise.

"You're putting too much pressure on your back," he said. He'd finished the driveway, was working down the sidewalk toward me. "Bend your knees when you lift."

After we went inside I stayed in the laundry room with Bonnie as long as I could, rubbing her down. She's a beagle, short-haired, can't shake the snow off the way a longhaired dog can. When I walked by the kitchen Dave told me to bring him the money I'd taken. "If you have it. If you don't we'll work something out."

I had it. Also two hundred dollars of Christmas money and eighty dollars left from my report card money in November.

I scuttled to my room to get the money, thirty dollars.

He put it in his pocket without looking at it.

"I'm sorry."

"Go to bed now."

School had already been cancelled for tomorrow, Friday. I was hoping he'd want to watch a movie with me.

It was 8:30, an hour before my school night bedtime. I felt sorry for myself, lying alone in the dark. Dave's mean, I told myself. My real father wouldn't be this way.

My friend Carl would say I got off easy. When we talked about stealing, Carl said you won't believe what you can get away with. I'd said if Dave catches me it's the end of the world as we know it.

Bonnie stayed downstairs because Dave was eating. I could hear the microwave ding, got up and opened my door a crack, heard Dave telling my mom I'd just been feeling my oats, whatever that meant. "Kids do stupid stuff sometimes. Don't worry about it."

When they came up Bonnie jumped into bed with me, settled on my chest.

I woke at the usual time the next morning, couldn't get back to sleep.

Dave was at the stove, asked how I wanted my eggs, said he'd appreciate it if he could take me and Bonnie over to his folks today. Give his dad a hand with the shoveling, keep them company. He asked politely, like I had a choice.

I shoveled our snow after I ate. It was easier today.

"Looks good," Dave said, when he and my mom came out.

He could have said sucking up to him didn't change anything.

I don't mind going to my grandparents, Dave's parents. They're nice and they stuff Bonnie and me like Strasbourg geese, Dave

says. I shoveled with my grandpa in the morning, was in the kitchen doing homework, drinking Coke, and eating the muddy buddies my grandma makes for me, when she called me to come quick, my dad was on TV.

She meant Dave. My real father is in California, I think.

Dave and the chief of police, looking serious, were standing behind a woman named Mandy Schott. "Help me," she cried. "Help me find my baby."

They TV station showed a picture of the baby, Ciara, fourteen months old, in a fancy red dress, sitting on Santa's lap.

"Precious," my grandma said. "See how she's looking around like she just doesn't know what to think."

Mandy said she'd taken Ciara to the mall, had finished shopping, was walking across the parking lot to her car, carrying Ciara because she was fussy. "It was past time for her nap." She smiled sadly. She'd opened her car door, Mandy said, leaned in to put Ciara in her car seat, when a man, a big Black man, pulled her back, ripped a screaming Ciara from her arms and tossed her, Ciara, like a sack of potatoes, into his SUV, also black, and took off.

Mandy was wearing one of the orange T-shirts Trucktown passed out at the fair this year. I could have gotten one but they weren't great and I didn't want to stand in line.

She was large and the shirt was too small.

She cried. "Please help me."

The chief said they'd welcome any information from the public.

Dave's the head detective and the other detectives hang out in his office. "How big is that big Black man?" one of them would ask.

As big as Quinton Lamar Spain, someone would say, bigger, and they'd laugh.

"I'll bet it was her," I said. "Mandy."

My grandma got mad. "How can you say that? Her own mother hurting that sweet little girl."

My grandpa winked at me. "Seth, do you think we should tell your grandma what your dad does for a living?"

"Surely you don't think she's lying?"

"A Black man with a white baby would attract attention."

"You're terrible," my grandma said. "Just terrible."

"Yes, dear," my grandfather said, fake meek. My grandma laughed when we did, said she was ashamed of herself.

Dave came to get me early.

My grandpa gave me a twenty for shoveling. I felt funny, because of what I'd done, tried to hand it back. Dave said I'd probably already eaten my pay in cookies, "but you can take it, Seth."

That was nice of you, he said, when we were outside with Bonnie.

We walked home. Dave said he'd be sitting on a hard chair all night working on hemorrhoid development, needed a break. I imagined him talking to his parents about me stealing. "I hate it," he'd say, "but we have to face facts. Let me know if anything goes missing."

"Are you going to tell Grandma and Grandpa what I did?"

He looked surprised. "Of course not."

I wondered if I'd hurt his feelings again. "I'm sorry."

"That was my line."

Bonnie stopped to take a whiz. I bent down to pet her.

"You get any closer she'll splash your face. Give the little lady her privacy and stand up and listen to me."

That's why he'd come home early, he said, to talk. He hadn't handled it right, should have put a stop to it as soon as he knew I was stealing. "I was wrong to trick you."

I was embarrassed.

"Shouldn't you be telling me it's wrong to steal and it doesn't matter if I'm sorry, all matters is if I steal again?"

He looked at me the way he did yesterday afternoon. I don't know why I didn't take what he was offering, let things go back to the way they were.

"I think you knew that all along, Seth."

Bonnie finished, kicked a little snow over the yellow spot. Good girl, I told her, though it was snowing again, covering everything up.

"Yes sir." Dave doesn't like being called sir. I told him I was sorry again.

"I got that part."

We went a block without saying anything.

When we were in our yard he stuck a foot in front of me, an old trick of his I never see coming, caught me when I lost my balance, lowered me to the ground, said I was a dirty bird but he'd take care of that, rubbed my face with snow. Cold, but the new snow was soft, didn't hurt the way the dirt-crusting old snow would. I grabbed his arms, donkey kicked. He slid backwards, letting me get to my feet.

Bonnie barked, ran in circles around us. We were hiding behind trees, throwing snowballs, yelling 'you're going down,' at each other, when my mother came home from work, told Dave, smiling, he was getting me too wound up, what she used to say when I was little.

"Not my fault, Honey Gal. I wanted to build a snowman." Then he went back to work.

Because of the extra day off, maybe, the weekend seemed long. Dave came home late Saturday night after I was in bed, went to bed himself. I heard his phone ring as it was getting light.

Before he left he came into my room to take Bonnie out, told me to go back to sleep.

He came home Sunday smelling of dirt and pine. My mom and I were eating supper and he looked at the spaghetti on our plates, said it was too slippery for him, trying to joke. I'm too tired to swallow, he said, when my mom offered to make him whatever he wanted. She helped him to bed, but he was up before I was Monday morning, frying bacon.

"I made plenty," he said, loading my plate.

During Biology, I turned on my phone, wanted to know if they'd found Ciara. Dave was on again, getting out of his car. Mandy Schott was in the passenger's seat.

"You're going to jail, Piggly Wiggly Woman," Carl said, looking over my shoulder.

Dave spoke into the camera, before he walked around to open the door for her, said Ms. Schott was cooperating with the police investigation, needed a break.

They didn't look like a couple on a date because Dave is too old, forty-seven.

My mother is thirty-six. I'd thought Mandy Schott was her age

or a little older, but on TV they said she was nineteen.

I recognized the restaurant. Dave takes us there.

He'd put his hand on what was probably the small of Mandy's back when they were walking across the parking lot but he's that way with all women. Stands up when they come into a room, opens doors, helps them with their coats.

Mandy would like the way Dave looks at you when you talk, interested.

He'd have a salad because he likes the bleu cheese dressing there. But the soup is good too, he'd tell Mandy. The Firehouse chili, maybe. He wanted the Reuben with homemade potato chips but the Monte Cristo is also excellent.

They'd have the sugar cream pie, a second cup of coffee. Or, if Mandy wasn't used to drinking coffee, Dave would tell her to have another Coke.

At the counter where you paid they had candy like Twin Bings and Malty Meltys, stuff you don't see much, and he'd take his time helping her figure out what she wanted. After they left the restaurant, when they were in his car, he'd asked her to tell him, please, where Ciara was, and then he and Mandy Schott drove around the lake long enough for her to eat her Charleston Chews before he took her to the police station.

My mother asked him if he'd put the lunch in his expense report. He said no, he didn't need to buy Mandy lunch for her to tell him what he needed to know. "I just felt sorry for her."

My mother said Dave was the one she felt sorry for. All that work and nothing to show for it but a dead child.

"You're not making sense," I told him. A nice meal wouldn't make up for prison.

"You're right. I hope I didn't make things worse for her."

You couldn't, my mother said. "Her life can't get any worse."

I'd looked at my phone again on the way home from school, saw the cadaver dog, Dagwood. I know him. His handler, Sergeant Mays, brings him to the Super Bowl Party we have at our house every year. The first time he came, when I was seven, I'd asked Dave if he could live with us after he retired from police work. "Did you see how much he liked me? He can sleep in my bed. I'll take good care of him."

"I know you would," he'd said, "but he's young, won't retire for a long time. Anyway, Ken Mays, and his wife, and his kids, are crazy for him. They'll want to keep him."

He brought Bonnie home the next weekend. Eight weeks old and, like Dagwood, a beagle.

On TV Dagwood was excited, jumping high as he could on his short legs. When he sat down, which is how he signals he's found something, the police moved around him to block the cameras so you couldn't see what it was.

The next time I saw him, Sergeant Mays was kneeling in front of him, giving him a treat, smiling and making over him, so Daggie Dog would know he'd done something good. If Sergeant Mays were to cry Dagwood would think he'd disappointed him.

Dave said the cops could see the outline of Ciara's body under the mud as soon as Dagwood headed there.

I thought Mandy hadn't made the grave deep because she didn't want to let Ciara go. I know it sounded stupid, but Dave said he thought so too. "She loves that little girl."

"Is that what you talked about at lunch?"

"No. We talked about high school and all the fun she had getting high with her stoner friends, shitting on toilet seats

in the girls' room, banging the lids down on top to smear it, skipping class to go shoplifting at Dilliard's, spray painting gym lockers with the N-word, harassing the Korean shop owners on Townes Street, trashing the teachers' cars."

"Really?"

"Best years of her life."

My mom sighed. She felt sorry for Mandy too.

Dave said it was going to storm. "I'm glad we found Ciara when we did. Dag can work through snow but they're expecting eight inches tonight and we might not have been able to find the landmarks Mandy gave us."

I wondered how Mandy was doing. She'd be on suicide watch, I knew, because Dave had told me that's what they do at the jail for at least the first 24 hours, if someone's charged with a high profile crime. One of the jail officers would check on her every fifteen minutes, maybe sit in front of her cell talking to her, trying to keep her spirits up.

I asked Dave if blunt force trauma, which was listed on the arrest warrant as the probable cause of death, would hurt, or if Ciara would have passed out right away.

"Passed out," he said. "At her age, the skull isn't fully developed, so she couldn't take much, but her injuries occurred over time and she'd have periods of consciousness when she hurt." He stood, knelt by my chair, held my right foot, still in my shoe, prodded it. "Tight in the box."

"They feel okay."

"They won't for long." He said he'd take me to the Nike store Saturday.

"You just bought him those."

"When his little tootsies are sore he can't concentrate on his school work."

Once my mother had said when she was in foster care it was a treat to go to Walmart for school clothes, instead of Goodwill.

"I hope you realize how lucky you are," she said tonight.

"What's for dessert?"

Dave laughed, my mother too. But nobody likes a smart aleck, she said.

"I like this one." I didn't hear anything sour in Dave's voice. "I like him a lot."

"You shouldn't swear in front of him. If he copies you he'll get in trouble at school."

"Seth's too smart for that."

He'd said shit, I remembered. Maddy spread shit, wanting someone to sit in it.

It started snowing for real after dinner. Dave said we might as well wait till morning before we shoveled. "You want to watch Justice League?"

Dave fell asleep on the couch as soon as he'd finished his lemon drizzle cake, his head back, his mouth open.

"He's tired, poor sweetie," my mother said, spreading the afghan over him, though we were warm, before she sat down on Dave's other side.

I slumped against him. Bonnie got in my lap and I scratched her head the way she likes. There's a velvet pillow on the couch I used to pat when I was little. Bonnie's coat is better. Soft, thick, sweet.

Dave snored a little, singsong.

I saw I was holding onto Dave's hand, the way I did before I was allowed to cross the street by myself.

He woke, kissed the side of my mother's face, looked down at my hand, smiled before he went back to sleep.

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**New Nonfiction from  
Antoinette Constable: "A  
Hundred Roses for Olga  
Herzen"**



Still Life with Roses of Dijon, 1882,  
Ignace-Henri-Jean-Théodore Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904)

To some people outside our circle, Charles Rist was seen as a saintly hero. Charles Rist, our grandfather, was a famous economist, and vice-governor at La Banque de France. He was among the first to sign Zola's "J'Accuse," in a public letter defending Alfred Dreyfus. It was a courageous act for a man of the establishment. For this gesture, he was condemned by some as a nefarious sinner.

My most vivid memory of my paternal grandfather is that he ran away from the Villa Amiel in Versailles—where he lived with his wife and mother-in-law, Olga Herzen—early on January 1, 1950. The Rist home had been designed and built for Olga Herzen at the time of her marriage.

Grand-Papa's chauffeur-driven Hotchkiss rushed him to Paris, while at the same time, the Russian Embassy delegation sped away from the capital toward his home, to honor our great-grandmother, the surviving daughter of Alexander Herzen. Her aristocratic father had written eloquently at the turn of the century, being the first to advocate the abolishment of serfdom and the distribution of land to peasants. In exile, he published his famous newspaper *The Bell* outside Russia. His writings had sparked the Russian Revolution. If Karl Marx was the Revolution's father, Herzen could be credited with being its grandfather.

The Soviets manning the Russian embassy in 1950 demonstrated their undying admiration for Herzen by delivering to Herzen's only surviving child, Olga, the gift of one hundred roses on New Year's Day. She became a hundred years old that year.

Each magnificent rose was an intense, brash red, trumpeting a total allegiance to Stalin. By contrast, the White Russian Community sent Olga a magnificent white azalea that stood at a place of honor in her salon. Delighted to speak Russian that day with native speakers, Olga sat in the sitting room, thanked the men, and nodded during the usual speeches, though she held her brass hearing horn well away from her ear. Then she spoke of her famous father, wished everyone a happy New Year, and told a few jokes. We children had been sent upstairs, but at least one of us managed to creep to the landing, to eavesdrop and peer through the railing.

Olga at a hundred was much prettier, more expressive and shapely than Queen Victoria in her widowhood. Like her, Olga wore black dresses down to her feet and high-laced boots. Her

sparse white hair was parted in the middle, pinned over her head in a tiny bun. She had a pronounced Bourbon nose. Her forehead was as wide as Herzen's, above blue eyes clouded by inoperable cataracts.

That day, we heard Olga speak a few sentences in a language we didn't understand, followed by the exuberant laughter of several men. Our grandmother, Olga's daughter, came out of her bedroom several times, wringing her hands, terrified that neighbors might have guessed who was visiting her solidly bourgeois French home, weighed down by the anticipated burden of disposing of a profusion of bloodred roses.

Our urbane, conservative grand-papa felt forced to spend the day at the Banque de France, since he refused any contact with the despised Communists. Grand-Papa had been born old, which meant he was unchanging in our eyes. He was about five feet ten, with a square face and rich gray mustache. The chain and fob resting on his vest added to his dignity. He wore immaculate, stiff-collared white shirts of fine linen, and three-piece suits made by his tailor, with discreet ties imported from England. A semicircle of gray hair ran from one ear to the other. To us, told biblical stories by our Jewish mother, he was a bald Moses dressed up as a judge.

He came home from Paris that evening well after dark. Before walking in, he checked that no black Volga cars with opaque windows and well-armed drivers had parked by the gate. Once inside his home, as a further precaution, he hid in the darkened hall, to make sure no foreign conversations were taking place in the sitting room. Silence confirmed that the enemy was again ensconced inside its fortified Russian embassy, since no fur-lined overcoats hung on the rack. At last he could take off his coat, hat, and gloves.

Grand-Papa's birthday, coincidentally, happened to take place on New Year's Day and was, by necessity, celebrated a few days later with many relatives. He never mentioned the crimson

roses flooding his home on his special day. Twelve of the loveliest had found their way into Olga's room, where he never set foot. The rest were apologetically given away, many to service people, so that within days, all trace of the embarrassing visit had vanished.

Germaine Monod, our grandmother, and her husband, Charles Rist, came to live at the Villa Amiel in Versailles in 1912, when Olga became a widow. It was in Olga's welcoming home that my grandparents raised their five sons. Perhaps because he looked like a slender, younger version of Alexander Herzen, my father, with his wit and generosity, was Olga's favorite grandchild.

My two sisters, and myself the middle child, started visiting the Villa Amiel as toddlers. In 1936, when we were in grade school, my older sister and I began to spend weekends and vacations there.

At the Villa Amiel, the day started for me when Rousseli, the spaniel, scratched at my bedroom door. I dressed and hurried to breakfast in the dining room, where my grandmother presided over a solid silver tea tray, teapot, and cream pitcher—gifts from a grateful Alfred Dreyfus and his wife to Grand-Papa on the occasion of his marriage.

Sometimes Olga, our great-grandmother, was talkative. I loved hearing stories about her devoted German governess Malwida, who'd swept her away from the Herzen household when she was twelve to live with her in Italy, or stories about her cruel stepmother, or the man with the strange look in his eyes who'd offered marriage when she was only sixteen, a man named Friedrich Nietzsche.

We children were too young to fully understand, but we'd heard whispers and had guessed there were secrets and scandals in the family. Only as adults, when biographers wrote about Herzen's life, did we learn about our great-great-

grandfather's reluctant acceptance, twice, of a ménage à trois, as recently depicted in Tom Stoppard's brilliant play trilogy, *The Coast of Utopia*.

It must have been in 1938, when Hitler marched into Austria and extreme persecutions of Jews started in Germany, that the adults began talking about pogroms and held alarming discussions about insufficient war preparations and my mother being Jewish.

"France will fall, that's inevitable, considering..." I imagined a lady looking like our mother falling headfirst down a long flight of stairs. It was terrifying. Better to sneak upstairs and visit Olga in her room.

Having lost most of her sight, Olga managed well by feel. When she pulled out family albums filled with postcards and brown photos, she knew which page showed my father in a sailor suit, or my father and his older brother on wooden bicycles without pedals; where to turn for the photo Dostoevsky had send of himself to her father, Alexander Herzen, whom he met several times in London.

Constance Garnett, translator of Russian novels, stated in a footnote to *The Brothers Karamazov* that the father in that novel was modeled on Herzen's own father, Ivan Yakovlev.

During my visits, Olga spoke not of our nebulously grim future, as did the family downstairs, but of the past, so vivid to her. Olga had shaken Garibaldi's hand and enjoyed Wagner's operas in his loge at Bayreuth as a friend and guest of Cosima Wagner. She knew Turgenev and had read his letters to her father and to her sister, Tata. She had met Kossuth, the Hungarian writer, and many others. All these people with ringing, mysterious names were fascinating characters in an endless story to me. I never tired of hearing about them.

Near blindness didn't keep Olga from her favorite occupation: attending to her vast correspondence. Over her writing pad she

placed a metal frame of horizontal bars enabling her to write line after even line down the page. She wrote in a slanting script in the five languages she spoke equally well: Russian, German, Italian, English, French, and Russian, to send out her own invitations.

Afternoon tea was a grand event, and the best meal of the day at the Villa Amiel. Our grandmother's Russian grandfather Herzen and her mother Olga's home had swarmed with guests. Olga, like her father, would have been ashamed had not two extra place settings been included daily for unexpected, last-minute guests. At tea, the adults talked among themselves and ignored the children. We kicked each other under the table. I took advantage of the situation by eating more than my share of quince paste squares and wolf-teeth anise seed cookies with impunity.

At the time, I had no idea what an illustrious group of people sat around the table. They'd come in response to invitations, jumping at the chance to talk to Olga, daughter of the famous Alexander Herzen. There was Baron Eugene de Vogue, author of a study of Russian novels, and grandmother's nephew Wilfried De Glehn and his wife, Jane, both artists and friends of Sargent, among others. At age five, in 1936, I posed for Jane. That portrait hangs on my wall.

On our grandmother's side, Germaine née Monod, Philippe Monod was a government minister. His brother was Jacques Lucien Monod, whose DNA studies won him a Nobel Prize. Another cousin, Jacques Louis Monod, became a well-known composer. Trocmé cousins also came to call, as well as Grand-Papa's brother Edouard, a tuberculosis specialist. My father and his brothers were frequent visitors, with wives and children. Scientists, engineers, educators, and politicians were also drawn to the Villa Amiel because of Grand-Papa. The lawyer Alexandre Parodi broke bread with us. It was Parodi, right-hand man to De Gaulle, who, at the end of the war, influenced Von Choltitz's decision not to destroy Paris. Several guests

were intimates of Charles Rist, our grandfather. Some guests belonged to both the Olga and the Charles Rist coteries: Marguerite Bonnet, founder of the first *La Maison des Etudiantes* in Paris; my father's friend Jean Milhaud, a nephew of Darius Milhaud; and a promising young novelist, friend of our uncle Noel, who recuperated from TB at my grandparents' house in the Alps. This was Albert Camus.

Often on Saturdays before the war, Grand-Papa whistled for Rousseli, and took us with the retriever for a walk to the nearby woods of Glatigny, where we roamed beneath European oaks, beeches, and leafy ashes. On Sundays, we sometimes took a favorite morning walk on the grounds of the palace, to the delightful *Hameau du Le Petit Trianon*, a protected, idyllic enclave of thatched cottages with a tiny pond, a dairy, a lighthouse, and a mill, set among lilacs, tulips, and forget-me-nots. It had been created for fourteen-year-old Marie-Antoinette, whom we believed played hide-and-seek around the corner with her ladies in period costumes.

One warm afternoon, shortly before the exodus of May 1940, Grand-Papa, frowning, strode along with us for a change in the geometric gardens of the *Palais de Versailles*. He gave talks to elevate our minds. Yet it seems to me now that as much as he wanted to teach us French history, our grandfather was in serious need of a respite from the worries of the fast-approaching catastrophe. It was years before I understood his talk, and learned that he'd just returned from Washington, where he was received by President Roosevelt before the US entered the war. Charles Rist had gone to Washington to ask the United States and Canada to stop exporting their nickel and molybdenum to Germany, essential to the manufacture of weapons. The meeting was successful.

Rousseli yapped an accompanying chorus as Grand-Papa poked his cane straight ahead of him as in a fencing move. "Louis XIV was a wiser ruler than he's given credit for. Look at his choice of admirable ministers, devoted to king and country,

indefatigable.” He stopped in his tracks. “You’ve heard of Colbert and Vauban, haven’t you?” We nodded, afraid to interrupt. “Vauban was an exceptional architect responsible for splendid fortifications on France’s borders. Remember, to fortify means to make strong, or stronger.” After a pause, he added, “As war minister, the king chose Louvois, who introduced the musket, uniforms, regular pay, and the use of barracks for the army. Great innovations. These ministers’ work greatly increased the influence and prestige of France. Thanks to them, France was a great nation. France had power.”

Grand-Papa poked the ground with the tip of his cane, before leading us back to the Villa Amiel, and repeated with conviction, “France was a great nation. France had power,” like a spell that could keep us, and all the beauty around us, forever safe.

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## **New Nonfiction from Patrick Hicks: “A Woman’s Place”**

Ravensbrück did not fall from the sky. It was planned. It was built. It was managed. The only all-female concentration camp in the Third Reich was so large and complex that no single person—whether they were a prisoner or a guard—could possibly know it all.