every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging . . . to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls! They may seek to escape, and yet they cannot; it is not alone their privilege and glory, but their doom; they are condemned to some nobility; all their lives long, the desire of good is at their heels, the implacable hunter." In the juxtapositions Oppenheimer so ably lays out, the reader cannot help but gain some version of this insight—which is not quite of the sort the author intends. ✝

A FULLY ASSOCIATED SENSIBILITY

William Bedford Clark

A Journey of the Mind: Collected Poems of Helen Pinkerton, 1945–2016
(Newberg, OR: Wiseblood Books, 2016)

In these disordered and disorderly times when we seem on the cusp of some new dark age, I find myself coming back more often than I like to the final lines of Pope's *Dunciad*:

> Lo! thy dread empire Chaos! is restored:
> Light dies before thy uncreating word;
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall,
> And universal darkness buries all.

Of course, the darkness of de-creation, however dark, is not universal. Helen Pinkerton's poems maintain the light and warmth of reason, balance, and craft, in keeping with the dictates of her friend and mentor Yvor Winters, and this generous selection of her verse, spanning seven decades, is an occasion for celebration and gratitude. In "Red-Tailed Hawk," Pinkerton offers an implicit antidote to Pope's horror at the dying Light. The eponymous bird soars on the up-thrust of an invisible, but wholly sufficient, thermal:

> Out of my sight, taking a certain path,
> Knowing from ancient blood, instinctive might,
> How to survive beyond the present drift,
> He seemed to shift from nothingness toward flight.
>
> Yet it was real, the warm column of air—
> Like being, unrecorded, always there.

The word "being" in the final line might be more properly rendered *Being*, for Pinkerton is a religious poet, not merely a "spiritual" one, though her brand of neoscholastic faith is anything but facile and pietistic. For her, the unseen and too often "unrecorded" (unacknowledged) power that ensures deliverance "beyond the present drift" is the God who

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reveals His name and nature to Moses by way of the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH: "I AM"—the Uncreated Creator. In lieu of an epigraph, Pinkerton's initial poem, "Metaphysical Song," amounts to a credo, and a firm one, but so emphatic a statement of belief has behind it a clear experiential recognition of the persistent claims of Eros, modern and postmodern doubt, and what Benedict XVI called "the tyranny of relativism." Following Aquinas, the poet may insist that "Evil is not what is, / But is good's absence," yet she knows that evil—however much a negation—remains evil nonetheless, a realm "Infertile, windless, where the black dogs hover, / Self-eaten, not in time or space, but never" ("The Romantic Eros"). The pull of the eternal and transcendent is palpable in Pinkerton's work, but she is free from any devaluing of the immediate created world, subject as it is to time and temptation, where the journey of her book's title necessarily plays itself out. Her evocative (if spare) rendering of landscapes, whether the rough Montana of her early years or the California coast she later came to love (see "Elegy at Beaverhead County" and "Point Lobos"), proves her a writer after Henry James's model—*one on whom nothing is lost*.

Pinkerton's imagination is ultimately incarnational. Some of her finest ekphrastic poems, and many are included in *A Journey of the Mind*, focus on iconic representations of the Madonna and Child; and her meditation on the Crucifixion, "Good Friday," a stunning exercise in fleshed-out intellection, affirms the defining paradox of the Gospels: eschatological reconciliation depends upon a very particular moment in a quite specific place where the temporal and eternal intersect, disgraceful death makes possible a more abundant life, and Being blots out Nothingness. A Christian poet in our time and place faces obvious hurdles when it comes to addressing skeptical—if not hostile and dismissive—readers, and some might argue that Pinkerton is, at least at times, guilty of preaching to the proverbial choir. She admits that her faith makes her vulnerable to accusations "Of softness, cant, self-weariness at best, / Of failure, fear, neurosis, and the rest" ("The Gift"), but the course of her personal salvific history has not been without its "stonie place[s]" (epigraph to "Crossing the Pedregal"). Pinkerton's two "Holy Sonnets" are instructive in this regard—and bear respectable comparison with those of Donne and Hopkins. The existential tension out of which Pinkerton's art evolves is explicitly dramatized in "The Return," a finely wrought *agon*, her contribution to a long and honorable tradition of dialogues between Flesh and Spirit or Heart and Mind. Here the willful pride of the unanchored post-Cartesian self, adrift in material and subjective reductivism, insists on its own prerogatives. But in this "inner dialogue," faith has the last word:

> "Your way, self-circumscribed, ends in
> the self
> And founders there. Mine exiting from
> loss,
> As does an infant from the womb to life,
> Integrates its return from its beginning."

While most of Pinkerton's highly polished poems are lyrical and brief (and her even briefer epigrams are notable for their wit and classical precision—see in particular "Literary Theorist"), the expansive dialogism of "The Return" points toward what may well be her greatest strength as a poet: her gift for the dramatic mode. Included in this collection are five longer poems in vigorous, supple blank verse devoted to the American Civil War and its causes and consequences. Two focus on Herman Melville, a writer whose defining struggles with belief and perennial distrust of abstractions make him

a congenial subject for Pinkerton, a professor of American literature and civilization by trade and author of a scholarly monograph on Melville and his political milieu. Drawing upon her extensive and intensive immersion in the period, Pinkerton convincingly channels a diverse range of nineteenth-century American voices.

In "Lemuel Shaw's Meditation," Melville's father-in-law, a distinguished Massachusetts jurist, looks back on a conversation with the novelist years before in which he tried to justify his decision to follow the letter of the positive law against the claims of natural law in an act of principled pragmatism. Choosing what he perceives to be the lesser of evils, the judge had returned a fugitive slave in violation of his own inner convictions, only to find that the war he sought to avert, promoted by uncompromising extremists on both sides, is now imminent. The old man at the end of his life is a tragic figure, victim of a ruthless dialectic where two rights, both just on their own terms, are set on a collision course and cancel one another out. At such a moment in history, there are and can be no victors. In "Melville's Letter to William Clark Russell," the aged novelist revisits the Civil War and its aftermath for the benefit of his British correspondent. Here, as in his *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, published just after the war's end, Melville acknowledges the heroism common to North and South and the basic human dignity the former should recognize in the latter. Slavery was an unmitigated horror, but the self-righteous dehumanizing of the seceding states by radical abolitionists and their allies led to unprecedented carnage. Melville recognizes the law of unintended consequences: you may become the thing you hate. The party of emancipation and equity has ushered in the Gilded Age and harbors imperialistic designs: "Parties in power identify that power, / And seldom justly, with the nation's good." Unscrupulous politicians "sat (and still they sit) / In our high councils, in our public forums / Citing benevolent ends through unjust means."

This same motif of corruption in high places, of betrayed promises and missed opportunities, emerges at the beginning of "Like and Yet Unlike," a verse epistle from the former Confederate general Richard Taylor to the historian and social critic Henry Adams—a kindred spirit despite his patrician New England roots. Witnesses to the scandal-ridden administration of Grant, "who acted with Old Army honor / At Appomattox," they have seen firsthand how the restored Union for which so many died has become a "democracy of thieves," a meretricious Vanity Fair: "It's well they are not here to see or know / The end of all their sacrifice. . . ."

Well after the war's end, a somewhat chastened General Taylor still clings to his region's martial code of honor and extols the heroism of battle, but the suffering of Southern women left to tend the dying home fires was another matter. Pinkerton gives us two particularly fine re-creations of the anguish they endured. In "Crossing the Pedregal," Robert E. Lee's wife, Mary Custis, writes her husband as Richmond burns. Denied his stoic resolve, driven sequentially from home to home by the advancing conflict, beset with a steadily debilitating disease, she comes to liken life itself to the forbidding volcanic wasteland—the Pedregal—her husband reconnoitered, charted, and crossed during the Mexican War. Her only hope now is "To follow an ancient trace" with "no light given," pushing "through the dark, / Knowing the right direction against the wind." In "The Old Poet: Margaret Preston Remembers," the speaker, a leading exponent of the Lost Cause, remembers her thwarted love for the young man who became Stonewall

Jackson and revisits the terrible division in her own family at the outbreak of Secession thirty years before. Now blind and deaf, she maintains only a tenuous hold on her once vital Christian faith, a reminder that one can lose oneself in lost causes.

The year 2015 marked the conclusion of the nation's sesquicentennial commemoration of the Civil War. The occasion paled in comparison with the degree of self-examination that had accompanied the celebrations fifty years ago. A consideration of Helen Pinkerton's war poems might have added much of value to our national conversation.

No review, however positive and laudatory, can do justice to the range and craft of Pinkerton's collected body of work. Here is a formalism that never loses sight of the human dimension in all its complexity. Hers is—*pace* Eliot—a fully associated sensibility. ✝

THE CAPITALIST REVOLUTION

Jeffrey Folks

Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World
By Deirdre Nansen McCloskey
(Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World is the third installment of the Bourgeois Era trilogy that includes *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* and *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World*. Like all truly important works, McCloskey's trilogy rests upon a simple and incontrovertible foundation: the great prosperity that began in northwestern Europe in the eighteenth century and spread to westernized societies such as Japan is grounded on the trade-tested innovation and commerce that resulted from granting freedom and dignity to ordinary, middle-class citizens. McCloskey's analysis of this crucial idea, while it owes much to earlier scholars, is nothing short of breathtaking in its scope, perception, and intellectual courage.

McCloskey's central concern is with the rising freedom and prosperity of "ordinary people" over the past five hundred years, those who benefited most from what she terms "trade-tested betterment" or what others would simply term "capitalism." The tenor of the work is restrained and scholarly, but the premise is radical. The great advancement of the past half millennium, beginning in northwestern Europe and now extending to much of the world, has resulted from equality of opportunity that itself stemmed from an extraordinary shift in ideas. Global society is radically more equal, more just, and more secure as a result of the acceptance of

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