

In Memoriam

John P. East
(1931-1986)

THERE WAS NO publication that John P. East loved more than *Modern Age: A Quarterly Review*. It was in these pages, he knew, and not in electoral campaigns or on the Senate floor, that the fundamental conflicts of our times are fought. It was here, too, that most of his own writing was published, and it was this journal that lay on his desk in Washington, D.C., the day before his death. When, after the death of Dr. David S. Collier, there was discussion of letting *Modern Age* cease publication, East took special pains to ensure its survival and offered to help the Intercollegiate Studies Institute raise funds for it in whatever way he could. To my knowledge, there was no other conservative organization for which he made a similar offer.

Senator East would therefore prefer to be remembered by *Modern Age* and its readers than by any other part of the conservative community, and it is proper that the journal should devote some space to his memory. There are many others among its contributors more gifted than I, but none, I think, who knew him as well and who worked as closely with him in both the intellectual and the political worlds in which he moved with equal facility.

That East was, as Senator John Tower called him, "the most thoughtful and in-

tellectually sound spokesman for conservative positions" in the Senate there can be no doubt. Time and again I have sat with him in committee meetings or on the Senate floor and watched as he silenced the chirpings of his liberal antagonists with a well-placed allusion or the exposure of a fallacy. Time and again I have seen other senators, liberal and conservative, stumble through their ghostwritten prepared remarks and watch in awe as East drew up his own outline and delivered extemporaneously a speech that cut to the heart of the matter under debate. There were other senators who had a larger store of factual information, but none possessed the mental rigor and agility that East commanded nor the understanding of the issues and the principles behind them. Few politicians today draft their own speeches, and those who do usually regret it, but neither I nor any other aide ever wrote a speech for him that he used. At most he would require "talking points" or summaries of basic information about issues and would mold these into remarks that were far more effective than what any staff could provide.

The very idea of using the work of others as his own offended his sense of intellectual honesty. In ten years of working in Washington, I have never encountered any other man to whom the baubles of

power with which that city is decorated meant less. It was only with great reluctance that he was persuaded by his staff to publish an occasional ghostwritten article under his name, and even then he often insisted that his name appear only as a co-author. He never included such articles in his own *vita*. All the glitter of being a senator, the name-dropping and networking by which the phantasms of power are chased, were irrelevant to him.

Indeed, East remained until his death an intellectual who had become a senator and never metamorphosed into a senator who had once been an intellectual. In working with him in preparing his book for the publisher, I often heard him complain of the distractions from the life of ideas that the Senate forced upon him; and it did not surprise me when I learned he had turned down the prospect of a powerful federal judgeship in preference to a chair at East Carolina University. He went out of his way to help his conservative intellectual friends as well as former academic colleagues, regardless of their political beliefs. He strongly supported M.E. Bradford for the chairmanship of the National Endowment for the Humanities and later for the directorship of the National Archives. He personally authorized a letter to President Reagan endorsing Andrew Lytle for the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and conservatives who had supported their cause in its lean years could always count on his help.

Philosophically, East was essentially an Augustinian, as he elaborated in his first article for *Modern Age* in 1972. He did not, I think, believe completely in free will and was something of a fatalist. Human action, including politics, was limited in what it could accomplish because of the inherent constraints and limitations of man's nature as well as the external contingencies of history. He was skeptical not only of liberal "solutions" but also of proposals supported by some conservatives that assumed too much about the Senate, the Reagan administration, or American political culture. I recall discussing his article on Augustine with him soon after it was

published, and he spoke movingly of what his religious faith had meant to him from the time of his paralysis. Years later, when checking a biblical allusion in his book, he pulled from his desk a worn and battered Bible, heavily underlined and annotated. He seldom discussed religion in public or private, but those who knew him well perceived the depths of his belief.

Did his final act of suicide betray his commitments? In his last year East had experienced an ordeal that no one else could appreciate fully. His severe hyperthyroidism, which he believed his doctors had failed to diagnose properly, was grueling in its physical and mental effects. He told me on more than one occasion that the experience of polio was minor compared to his more recent affliction. He suffered from depression, a symptom of the glandular disorder, and also from concern that his political and academic careers were both at an end. In his final months he recuperated, and the depression seemed to lift, but it would return periodically. Despite the appearance of improvement, there was toward the end something in control of his behavior, I believe, that was not John East. To say his suicide was a betrayal of his religious and philosophical commitments is too easy a judgment for me to make. Let others who have suffered less make what judgment they will.

Both politically and intellectually, East sought to unify, to avoid the polemics of factionalism, and to insist on the pursuit and achievement of common goals. Hence, he seldom engaged in the debates and controversies among conservatives and tried to keep his eye on what bound them together. The community of the bonds and roots of conservatives as different as Ludwig von Mises and Russell Kirk is a persistent theme in his forthcoming book and reflects his own character and conduct.

There is no passage in East's writings that better encapsulates his commitments and his vision of conservatism than these sentences from his study of Willmoore Kendall (who, with Russell Kirk, was his favorite contemporary political thinker). Discussing Kendall's view of the philo-

sophical roots of *The Federalist*, East expressed his own vision of man as well as what he regarded as the seminal tradition of the Western and American orders:

[T]he follower of this tradition is impressed (indeed, awed) with the wonder of creation and mystery of being. He appreciates the relevance of such concepts as "original sin," "evil," and the "tragic sense of life." With Saint Augustine, he understands that "pride" is the ineradicable canker contributing to the imperfectibility of the human condition in this earthly sojourn. He loves and reveres man as the creature and child of God, but he has no illusions about the erection of a worldly utopia, for basic human nature pre-

cludes it—Man is not God, and the infinite complexity of life, thought, and matter, as the handiwork of God, will not yield to the iron-cast molds of man-made uniformity, that the egalitarians seek to impose.

It was the humility of this philosophical commitment, coupled with a personal humbleness that was manifest in his natural courtesy and affability to all around him, that gave John P. East the aristocratic presence that he contributed to public life. It was a presence unique in our time—and one that cannot easily be replaced.

—Samuel T. Francis

Austin Warren
(1899-1986)

ON THE DEDICATORY page of my first book I called him an evangelist; in speaking of him to others I often referred to him as a catalyst, the greatest one I had ever known. But by whatever name he went (and he would have said he went by many), he was always a celebrator: he stood for life and he stood for joy. Even now, as I write this, I recall his great-hearted laugh; and even now, with his loss still fresh, I smile. Mrs. Warren, whom I've always called "Dr. K." since I knew her professionally before they were married, tells me that I was the last of his friends to come to see him. Somehow I regard that as a sort of privilege—our first visit in five years. His mood, as we sat there on the front porch of the charming old house in the quiet Providence, Rhode Island, neighborhood, matched the August season: mature, serene, waiting now for the harvest. Then ten days later he was gone. And as with all such things, one has to assess one's loss and decide how best to con-

tinue one's now diminished life. The key to that, of course, is always to recollect the blessings, the enrichments which came before.

I first heard of Austin Warren from Cleanth Brooks, who observed to me when I first began graduate work at Yale that *Theory of Literature* (1949) was the nearest thing to an *organon* we had in our business. (Somehow it now seems appropriate that it was Professor Brooks who gave me the news of Austin's death.) But I first actually met Austin in the spring of 1955 when I visited the University of Michigan for a job interview. Though I went to my *audience* (there is no other word for it) in some trepidation and though I knew right off that here was a formidable *presence*, it didn't take him long to put me at ease, with talk of common interests and common friends; and he ended by observing that he should certainly vote for me when the question of my employment was raised. I felt then that I was in good hands.

As it turned out, I taught at Michigan for three years and came to know Austin better and better as time went on; I visited in his apartment on South State Street and even sat in on his classes when my own schedule would permit. I found him enormously stimulating, always exciting, sometimes even “carried away” with his various enthusiasms. He loved to go off on tangents too; but he always knew when to come back home, his indirections always, I thought, carefully directed. From the beginning, too, I knew that his wit and liveliness of mind were firmly rooted, as such qualities always are, in a serious commitment to serious things: Austin would have said that there is no such thing as “idle” laughter or “mere” entertainment. Yes, they always *mean*; and yes, comedy is a serious business, as much so even as tragedy.

He was a “character” on campus of course, and of course he knew it. And the stories about him were legion. Of a young woman who observed that Thomas Wolfe’s prose style was “terse,” he asked, “Terser than whose?” And when a student asked him what, really, was “all that irony” he and other critics seemed to find so important in poetry, he replied, “There are only a few of us who really know, and *we’re* not telling.” He did not suffer fools gladly, but he was never unkind. And always, I thought, he was on the side of *sense*—witness his brilliant essay-review of Thomas H. Johnson’s edition of Emily Dickinson which I have sent a couple of generations of students to read. He also had the courage to say he had only “just” managed to read *Ulysses* all the way through; and he dismissed Proust’s *magnum opus* with “O, that old thing . . .” Well, it takes a brave man to say such things in public, but Austin was always that. He did not hesitate to magnify the lowly either, and he certainly was no slave of fashion or mode. Look at *New England Saints* (1956), where he “discovers” or reevaluates the minor and neglected. For that matter, look at the essays he wrote, at the very end of his career, on Auden, on Lewis Carroll, on Walter Pater. Volumes of

graduate school prose could never say so much so well; indeed, his essay on Lewis Carroll might well be considered “definitive,” if criticism can ever aspire to such heights. And his style, which was always for him very much the man, grew ever tighter, more precise, more truly elegant—the end result of a lifetime of discipline and practice.

Well, such things are matters of public record and easy enough to discuss and debate. But it is less the Austin of record than the Austin as friend that I find of more immediate importance to me right now. He read my brand-new doctoral dissertation and said, “This must be published.” Well, it never has been but he persuaded me to think more of a work that I knew was perhaps more “original,” more gimmicky than it should have been and, in the process, to think more of myself. When he found that I was trying to write fiction—stories about the only thing I knew, small-town life in the South, he “ordered” me to bring him a new story to read every Monday. And I did so. A thorough New Englander himself, he could honor someone else’s commitment to his own culture, his own place, and his subsequent attempt to make sense out of it all; and I often found him delighted with what I was doing. But he never praised it inordinately, I think; indeed, it was more the act of work itself that he was honoring, encouraging me to think well of myself for trying something I had not been “trained” to do, to think that perhaps I could add another string to my bow thereby. *Keep going*, he always seemed to urge, and see what happens. And in due course, a good deal has—and none of it what I would ever have expected.

Did Austin know I was a writer in the making? I have no idea. But what he gave me then—and continued to give me to the very end—was hope, that most underestimated of the three virtues commended by St. Paul to the Corinthians. The world itself and the academic world in particular are always overstocked with those who are quite literally in what I have always called the discouragement business, and

one trusts there will be a special circle in Hell reserved just for them. (I think especially of one common acquaintance of ours, of whom Austin observed, "He puts his worst foot forward.") And it was hope and exhortation, sometimes of course coupled with admonition, that Austin gave all his students and all his friends (the two were effectually one and the same).

It all took its toll of him. In all that giving of himself he was bound to draw on capital, with consequent sufferings in body and mind. Could he have been different, could he have husbanded his resources better? I have sometimes wondered, and I think now perhaps not. It was simply his nature to be as he was, and I do not think he could have lived otherwise. He felt "called" to teach, I have no doubt. And he often spoke of carrying on his healing ministry, of healing the sick and raising the dead; and I think he was being more candid than some might have suspected. Again, the wit was "serious."

In all this of course, "Dr. K." was quite literally a godsend: she watched over him with the greatest diligence and care. And yet she always spoke of what Austin had given *her*. And I thought of them as the most devoted of couples. Much of all this was in my mind as we sat there on that golden afternoon, knowing each of us, I

am sure, that it was probably our last meeting. I told Austin, all over again, that he was the quintessential *survivor* who had come through many afflictions, many woes, and that he had surely been preserved to act as an *exemplum* and an exhorter for all the rest of us, to keep us going, to urge us on. And again, I told him that he had been the great catalyst in my life, his the greatest gift that any teacher can have. And his reply was characteristically generous: he knew, he said, of some of my difficulties along the way and rejoiced with me now in happier times and circumstances.

Our friendship, our correspondence continued for over thirty years—the greatest possible blessing in my life. But his passing now brings me not so much sorrow as thanksgiving. His work was done, and he was ready to go: he said as much on that last afternoon. And I think now of Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium":

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder
sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress. . . .

There's no more really to say except, as Austin himself might well have added, Amen. And, of course, Hallelujah!

— Robert Drake

MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



Hero-Worship in Retrospect— An Editorial

THE SECOND AND CONCLUDING part of Professor Robert Nisbet's "Roosevelt and Stalin" gives added dimension and distinction to this issue of *Modern Age*. One who reads and reflects on this essay in its totality—and particularly one who has lived through the dark years in which the epochal actions and decisions that Nisbet assesses took place—cannot ignore the censorial judgments that the essay presents. Even liberal diehards should be hard pressed to rebut Nisbet's diagnosis of events and personalities that have made a permanent imprint on the process of modern civilization. In particular we are also reminded of how the quality of political leadership affects universal history. Clearly, what Nisbet reveals is that an intrinsic rhythm of disintegration was to identify the consequences of the kind of working relation that Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Josef Stalin developed. No two leaders did more to restructure the postwar world than did Roosevelt and Stalin. As both witnesses to and legatees of the unusual relationship of these two men, who held in their hands the fate of humanity for a crucial period of time, we can hardly minimize the momentous outcome of that relationship. Its political repercussions no less than its historical psychology and sociology are nothing less than astonishing.

One's evaluative response to "Roosevelt and Stalin" should give some sort of index to one's willingness to aspire to a deeper awareness of political conditions that in the end assume transcendent moral meaning and validity. For many senior readers of *Modern Age*, Nisbet's essay should excite remembrance of things past. And for younger readers born after World War II, "Roosevelt and Stalin" should help provide historical circumspection that encourages the kind of probative understanding (and humility) that the lessons of history impart to those who live in the postmodern climate in which an insidious revisionism and relativism combine to foment the ahistorical, nonhistorical, and antihistorical attitudes that pervade the intellectual community in its present deconstructionist phase. These attitudes, however, are blasted by the explosive power of Nisbet's case against Roosevelt and by his rigorously sustained argument that the President's "political courtship" of Stalin reached its height first at the conference at Teheran in 1943 and then at Yalta in 1945. "Teheran was in a sense Stalin's Munich," Nisbet writes,