

celebrated in the discipline as the Prometheus of critical history, demonstrated that the document validating the Emperor Constantine's bestowal of one-third of the Empire to the Roman Church was a forgery.

Among other arguments, Valla exposed the anachronistic insertion of Eighth Century terms in an ostensibly Fourth Century text. To Ginzburg this is to undergird polemical rhetoric with evidential proof. Valla's rhetoric is undoubtedly polemical but to historicize it in the deconstructionist vein seems beside the point. Indeed, Ginzburg opens this chapter with a description of Valla's intention to grind an anti-papal ax. A reference to Valla's bias scarcely serves to dispose of his demonstration of the inauthenticity of the Donation. To do that would require the appeal to some other criterion of valid argument: papal infallibility, for example. Otherwise one evades the inescapable question: Constantine did, or did not, (really) bestow one-third of the Empire on the Roman Church and falls back on an all-purpose, self-refuting, polemically selective ultra-scepticism.

Ginzburg's brilliant lectures persuasively convey his conviction that, while evidential sources do not offer immediate access to reality and historical recreation proceeds from the constructs of the historian, 'construction . . . is not incompatible with proof; the projection of desire, without which there is no research, is not incompatible with the refutations inflicted by the principle of reality. Knowledge (even historical knowledge) is possible' (p.25).

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Richard Price (1998) *The Convict and the Colonel. A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean*. Boston, Beacon Press, pp. 284. \$27.50/£19.64 (cloth); \$18.00/£12.85 (paper).

Richard Price and I spent a wretched year together at the beginnings of our postgraduate degree in anthropology at Harvard in 1964. Well! 'Wretched' is my word. You will have to ask Richard for his. But in retrospect, I think, for a most historical anthropologist and a most anthropological historian like Price, it was a most unhistorical year. That made it wretched for me at least.

We were in the hands of a preacher of a brand of anthropology called Componential Analysis and of an enthusiast for the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF). Kinship was without process and narrative in Componential Analysis. The thousands of observational texts in the HRAF were without context and the seeing 'I'. To my prejudiced eye, that was being unhistorical. I still have my papers for the courses – now that is being historical. The first sentence of one reads: 'The method followed in this paper has been to try and imitate – with marked lack of success – the suggestions and ideas on formal analysis of kinship terms as outlined by Goodenough, Lounsbury, Romney and Andrade'. The grade B minus was the equally unenthusiastic response.

It is not just my prejudice, though, that Richard Price is a passionate, imaginative, state of the art historian. It is not just my prejudice that Richard Price is a passionate, imaginative, state of the art anthropologist. *First Time, Alabi's World*, and now *The Convict and the Colonel* are seminal histories reaching out beyond the confines of their space and time to however we categorize our histories – medieval, modern, British, Pacific, encounter, social. They are powerful, sensual statements, exemplars of how to proceed when true stories in a postmodern world are such a complex web of past and present, I and Thou, person and object, science and art.

Science and art? Science: there are not many anthropologists who believe as fervently in archives as Richard Price. That has been the mark of his writings since he began. Archives, in a half a dozen languages and dozens of institutions. Archives, in the most local of deposits and the most national. Archives, of extraordinary variety, read with amazing ingenuity and energy. Price to me is that most admirable of historians. He believes in grind. He believes in exhaustiveness. He is one of those 'beetle hunters climbing up the great pyramids of antiquity' as Nietzsche mockingly describes historians. And loving it!

Science and art? Art: Price tells a good story, in many voices. The aesthetics of the visual and the word have always been his concern. Words on a white page have always been larger than themselves in Price's mind. So fonts and design shape different voices, give different tonalities to his story. So the photographs are not 'illustrations'. They are readable texts.

The Convict and the Colonel is all of these things and more. It is a book by a writer totally confident in his freedoms. How often when the rest of us set out to tell our stories, do we take a hundred steps back and keep shouting 'I'm coming! I'm coming!'. Price, with the confidence that his readers are in tune with their age, 'just does it', like a Booker Prize winner, like a Brecht, like a Picasso.

These days I talk much to my students about being writers rather than 'doers' of history. I feel that Price has been listening to my lectures. He has long done what I tell them to do.

Be mysterious, I tell them. Being mysterious means that there is work to be done by the story-teller and the reader. There is no closure to mysteries, only another story, another translation. A writer should liberate the readers to go where they want. It is their conversation that we are joining. There is a certain abruptness or directness in being mysterious. We have to have the confidence that readers have instantaneous skills in being where we take them.

Be experiential. We write with authority when we write as observers. Not as spectators, but as observers. Our own honesty is at stake as observers. As observers our cultural antennae are at their peak. Every trivial detail is larger than itself in an observation. We see the interconnectedness of things. We read the gestures with the same astuteness that we need to have to survive culturally in everyday life. We are seeing the multiple meanings in every word. We are catching meaning in the context of the occasion. Above all, as observers we are reflective. We see ourselves mirrored in our own observations. We know our honesty. We know our uncertainties. We know our tricks. Be experiential in your writing, I tell my students, and the reader will come with you.

Be compassionate. It is awfully easy for an historian not to be compassionate. I sometimes think that this is because we write in the past tense and with hindsight. Try writing what you have written in the past tense in the present tense and you will see what I mean. Suddenly you have to know so much more. Suddenly the perspective is forward and not backward. We do not have to write in the present tense though to be compassionate. What we have to do is to give back to the past we are writing about its own present tense. We give back to the past its own possibilities, its own ambiguities, its own incapacity to see the consequences of its action. It is only then that we represent what actually happened.

Be entertaining. I am using the word 'entertaining' in its etymological sense, as Victor Turner used it, of 'holding between', *enter tenere* in the Latin. Think of all the tricks we use in the theatre to hold the gaze and attention of an audience – darkened theatre, stage curtains, the triangular perspective of the stage. We have to find ways to entertain our readers in the same way.

Be performative. There is no such thing as perfect conditions for a performance. A performance is always limited in some way – by a stage-call, by a deadline, by a word limit. Performance is always heralded by a risk taking. In performance, the risk-taking is often breaking through the formalism that limits us. In performance we can not live by the formalities of the rules. We have to live by the meaning of the rules. We have to take the rules further, to make them work.

Be reforming. Writing can change the world. In small ways: make it laugh, make it cry, make it serious for a moment, stop the dumbing-down. We can not give life to the dead, but we can give them voice. We can not give justice

to the victims, but we can shake the living from their moral lethargy to change the things in the present that are the consequences of the past.

I think *The Convict and The Colonel* is mysterious, experiential, compassionate, entertaining, performative and reforming.

The Convict? He's Médard Aribot, victim of the French law of permanent banishment, the Law of 27 May 1885, less a rubric of punishment, Price notes, than a rule of public hygiene to cleanse society of undesirable elements. Médard belongs to the Isle of Martinique, where the Prices, Richard and Sally, have lived and breathed its extraordinary atmosphere for 37 years. Médard is one of the *relégués* of Devil's Island for eight years and more, two thirds of that time being additional sentences for escapes and refusals to comply, much of it in solitary confinement. He lives most of the rest of his life in caves on the edge of Martinique society. On the edge? That's the question.

The Colonel? He's Colonel Maurice de Coppens, a live colonial administrator on Martinique, but whose character is as much graphic as live. Médard makes a wooden sculpture of him. If you have ever seen the book *The Savage Hits Back* (Jules E. Lips, 1930/1966, University Books, New York), you will immediately recognize the sculpture in its origins and genre. Hybridity at work, I suppose we are tempted to say these days. Or maybe it is just natives laughing. Nothing blunts the Terror like a laugh.

Why should I spoil a good story? 'Remembering Médard. The Seine of History' is Price's title for the last third of his book. Get hooked!

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Steven Spielberg (director); Robert Rodat and Frank Darabont (screenplay) (1998) *Saving Private Ryan*. Distributed by: DreamWorks. Running time: 170 minutes.

Terrence Malick (director/screenplay) (1998) *The Thin Red Line*. Distributed by: Twentieth Century Fox. Running time: 170 minutes.

At the close of the last century, two filmmakers of very different, but equally magisterial visions of how the camera can resurrect the past turned their attention to two decisive battles of World War II. Stephen Spielberg, always best working on an epic scale, recreates the D-Day invasion, the largest expeditionary force ever mobilized, in *Saving Private Ryan*. Terrence Malick, whose two earlier films, *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* were cinematic tone-poems on the American landscape, moved to the lush terrain of the Solomon Islands to recapture the long, bitter struggle over Guadalcanal, a turning point in the Pacific theatre. For Spielberg, a technical wizard but conventional thinker, war is a theatre in which common men act, unceremoniously but