

Shrewd-eyed Dwarf

by Robert Gear (December 2017)



Gran Coloso Dormido, Francisco de Goya, approx. 1824

I recently came across a short poem by Thomas Hardy called 'At a Country Fair.' Below is the poem in full. As you read, consider what it refers to and what Hardy and any reader of his own day could *not* have imagined it referring to. Clearly, knowledge of the present can enlarge our sensitivity to something written in the past—and vice versa.

At a bygone Western country fair

I saw a giant led by a dwarf
With a red string like a long thin scarf;
How much he was the stronger there

The giant seemed unaware.

And then I saw that the giant was blind,
And the dwarf a shrewd-eyed little thing;
The giant, mild, timid, obeyed the string
As if he had no independent mind,

Or will of any kind.

Wherever the dwarf decided to go
At his heels the other trotted meekly,
(Perhaps—I know not—reproaching weakly)
Like one Fate bade that it must be so,

Whether he wished or no.

Various sights in various climes
I have seen, and more I may see yet,
But that sight never shall I forget,
And have thought it the sorriest of pantomimes,

If once, a hundred times!

How poignant, immediate, and at the same time so resonant. Hardy was describing real people and events of a 'bygone' time, but how forcefully the poem calls to us today. The poem moves us, as the original occasion moved Hardy, who in the penultimate line calls it 'the sorriest of pantomimes.'

Hardy's poetic vision was largely naturalistic, not metaphorical, but that does not mean we cannot pin our own meanings on the transitory phenomena depicted by his words.

To me these lines echo down the years. Who now is the blind giant? And who the 'shrewd-eyed' little dwarf? I think we know. To read this poem now is to see a blinded Europe, like a pitiful Gloucester or more precisely, Oedipus (the torment being self-inflicted). And come to think of it, Dylan Thomas' line describing his dying father 'An old tormented man three-quarters blind,' is also somehow suggestive of our predicament.

Europe is sightless through its own lack of visual or mental acuity, strung along by a civilizational pigmy, shrewd in its calculations. If the giant does not somehow break the thin red scarf the dwarf will grow from our constant and sometimes deadly annoyance into a ruthless giant, at which point it will be too late. Our complacency, our innocence will be shattered perhaps never to rise again. Never such innocence again, as Larkin put it. The time we live in now, despite its rampant cynicism, is a kind of innocence or perhaps complacency about the ruthlessness and determination of our 7th Century antagonist.

How can the blind giant throw off the shackles? First, by regaining his vision. Can Europe gain an understanding of what it faces in the slouching menace? The elites of the continent

are clearly incapable of such vision. They, and we their underlings, are reaping the proceeds of smug complacency and face a slow-motion dégringolade. The proverbial frog seems presently incapable of jumping out of the gradually heating water.

Almost every nation in Europe has a problem with Islamization, but various are the ways in which the religion of peace is manifesting itself 'peacefully.' Pace Tolstoy, 'Each unhappy *nation* is unhappy in its own way.' And so, let us count the sundry ways in which peace is on the march . . . uhh, no, on second thought, let's not. This is not the place to catalog the myriad variety of peaceful activities engaged in by the 'newcomers'; a kind of inversion of *e pluribus unum*, one ideology leading to many forms of assault; from rape gangs to mass assault to jihad lawfare, and so on, but all in the glorious goal of a worldwide (and most urgently Eurowide) Caliphate.

The 'red string like a long thin scarf' (line 3) sounds like it could easily be snapped by the giant. It would be a matter of summoning up strength of will, not physical strength. It is not an inevitable calamity. And so too, the West and its enervated vision, could realistically fight back. But, a point will come when the dwarf's strength will tumesce to an extent that will be near impossible to combat.

A recent historical precedent comes to mind. The Nazis were relatively feeble (although rearming steadily) when in March 1936 they reoccupied the Rhineland, an action that had been prohibited under the Versailles Treaty. France alone, with or without Britain's help, could have easily prevented this reoccupation. As William Manchester writes in volume II of his biography of Churchill, '*The Last Lion*,

The moment the French infantry moved, calling his (Hitler's) bluff, the same treaty required Britain to support France with her own forces. The fledgling Wehrmacht would be routed. Hitler and his Nazis would be the laughingstock of Europe.

At the Nuremberg tribunals, ten years after this event, Hitler's chief of staff, General Alfred Jodl, stated that "the French could have blown us to pieces." According to Manchester, Hitler himself was reported to have said, "If the French had marched into the Rhineland, we would have had to withdraw with shame and disgrace."

Clearly, the enemy is of a different kind now, and the resources necessary to combat the onslaught are not comparable. The motivations (mainly fear, according to Paul Johnson) of failing to stand up to the Nazis when they were still weak are different too, since the mental atrophy (and perhaps too an element of fear) bequeathed to us by decades of political correctness was not an issue during the interwar period.

Back to the shrewd-eyed dwarf. In what way is dwarfishness characteristic of Islam? The dwarfishness was and is both intellectual and moral. Initially, the desert ghazis fed off the achievements of those they conquered. In time a Golden Age ripened (as we are somewhat too often and too insistently reminded), and with it came developments in several scientific fields, including optics, mathematics and chemistry. Yes, a period of intellectual creativity and energy flourished early in the Islamic Ummah. But this promising start was superseded by the eventual rejection of Hellenic thought, and this led to

intellectual ossification. Various explanations of why the Islamic world floundered have been proposed. A principal one is robustly argued by Robert Reilly in [*The Closing of the Muslim Mind*](#). What has been called Islam's intellectual suicide follows its denial of reason, and therefore, of the ability to acquire knowledge. In short, the Islamic thinkers who prevailed dismissed reality as unknowable. The philosophical failure was ushered in by the preeminence of al-Ghazali and the ascendant Asherite sect, whose dogma became a jurisprudence of dead ends.

Statistical evidence of Islam's failure to match the achievements of Europe and North America (assuming any were needed!) can be found in Charles Murray's impressive attempt to give some objective basis to achievement in the major areas of human endeavor in his masterful [*Human Accomplishment*](#). Murray provides inventories of the most significant figures in sciences and arts from 800 BCE to 1950. The 'Top Twenty' in each category are those who made significant breakthroughs in the fields of Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Earth Sciences, Physics, Mathematics, Medicine and Technology. Murray also has lists for Literature, Philosophy and Painting for Western and Non-Western domains. But, and here is the important point, in the Top Twenty lists of the *Sciences*, not one Arab or Muslim name appears. There is no Muslim Newton or Einstein because there *could not nor cannot be*. The demotion of reason and the denial of the connection between cause and effect from the 11th century onwards has been a persistent millstone around the neck of Islamic progress, which has yet to be cast off. As Averroes said in his philosophical rebuttal of al-Ghazali, "the denial of causality makes genuine knowledge impossible." Clearly, ideas have consequences, but to extend Richard Weaver's meditations, *so do lack of ideas and having no ideas at all*. Well, fancy that!

According to Reilly, many followers of the religion we are discussing fail to understand cause and effect. Rather, as Reilly points out, "they live in a pre-philosophical, magical realm where things happen unaccountably due to mysterious, supernatural forces." This is why such highly improbably and ridiculous things are believed both before and even *after* breakfast. For example, many Muslim 'scholars' argue that Columbus encountered Arabic speaking natives on his arrival in the Americas. And, amazingly, at least for us infidels, a Quranic 'formula' for the speed of light exists. But why catalog? Even radical leftists haven't gone that far in their confused thinking (well, not yet anyway—but just give them time—and in the interests of brevity I am leaving aside the part played by leftist control of the flow of information in this ongoing train wreck). Since about the eleventh century, there can have been no Arab or Muslim Lavoisier, Edison, Galileo, Euler, Pasteur or Watt, and so on and on. Those who are affronted by such facts should note that Murray goes to great pains to identify and create objective criteria for 'greatness' and to eradicate the possible bias of national chauvinism, sexism, Eurocentrism, racism and elitism from his inventories. Naturally, Dead White Males overwhelmingly dominate the narrative of human accomplishment—but that is another story, and the leaden idiocy of those perpetually offended by this fact does not concern us here.

As to moral behavior, Reilly points out that, the "delegitimization of ethics as a field of rational inquiry has also led, quite logically, to the moral infantilization of many Muslims, who are not allowed to think for themselves as to whether an act is good or evil, lawful or forbidden." Proper action, for a *good* Muslim, is what comes out of the Islamic trilogy; there is nothing good or bad but Mohammed and his Companions make it so. Here, I don't need to extrapolate on this critical problem, based as it is in what Reilly calls 'a deformed theology.' But clearly, many of those leading the

demographic take-over of Europe are still imbued with a dysfunctional culture that is the mainstay of intellectual and moral dwarfism.

So, the shrewd-eyed dwarf of Hardy's poem is tugging on a red, but to us, invisible cord, waiting for his chance to choke us or lead us into an atavistic pit of at least partly our own making. As Toynbee pointed out "civilizations break down and go to pieces if and when a challenge confronts them that they fail to meet." And yes, that would truly be the sorriest of pantomimes. The deterministic cosmos hinted at in Hardy's poem is not quite an inevitable doom. Perhaps the cunning of history can be outwitted. The fate of an indolent Europe is still waiting to be determined, and yet some from among us might yet cut the red string of destiny. Whatever the case, a rearrangement of L.P. Hartley's opening lines would read, "the future will be another country; they will do things differently there."

Robert Gear now lives in the American Southwest. He is a retired English teacher and has co-authored with his wife several texts in the field of ESL.

More by Robert Gear [here](#).

Please help [support](#) *New English Review*.