

of sermonic eloquence; the boundaries of the genre; the readability of texts for non-specialists; the inclusion of subgenres (execution sermons, funeral sermons, election sermons, etc.); the range of styles; and the shape of tradition, which in this case means the extraordinary consistency of form for the first two centuries, followed by a dramatic diversification in the last two.

The British have a long history of reading their sermons as literature. In America, where the sermon has been more consistently cultivated, more varied in development, more influential on writers in other genres, and more central to the culture in general, we have not done so. The aversion to religion in cultural studies may be partly to blame, but so is the historian's or theologian's reflex of disciplinary defensiveness, kicking out so sharply in Morgan's review. I can only imagine that the intensity of Morgan's identification with historical scholarship has blinded him to the possibility of any other kind.

Michael Warner

Professor of English
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

Edmund S. Morgan replies:

I am happy to learn that Professor Warner's criterion for selecting sermons lay in their literary merit. I confess that I considered that possibility and dismissed it, because the literary qualities of the sermons chosen did not seem to me to place them among other examples of "America's best and most significant writing."

GROWING UP

To the Editors:

In the second column of her essay on the Mary Bell case, to which you assigned the uncharacteristically sensational heading

"Killer Children" [NYR, May 20], Hilary Mantel devotes several paragraphs to the almost five years young Mary spent at the Red Bank secure approved school unit. The British juvenile justice system has always regarded what we call "treatment" of antisocial conduct as primarily an educational matter, and accordingly has assigned administrative responsibility to the central educational authority, in contrast to the American practice of dividing major responsibility for delinquents between correctional and mental health agencies. Regardless of this distinction, it is clear from Gitta Sereny's *Cries Unheard*, and even from Ms. Mantel's review, that Mary was very successfully managed at Red Bank, that while she was at the school she made tremendous progress in recovering from her terrible early years, and that subsequently, despite considerable adversity including incarceration in a less than supportive prison, she was eventually able to function quite well as an independent-living adult. For a horrendously damaged eight-year-old serial killer, this is a rare and stunningly successful therapeutic outcome.¹ Yet Sereny and Mantel seem oblivious to the significance of what they have described.

Both Mary's recollections, as quoted by Sereny, and sophisticated contemporary observations by such scholars as Spencer

¹Contrast it, for example, with the Willie Bosket story meticulously reconstructed by Fox Butterfield in *All God's Children: The Bosket Family and America's Tradition of Violence* (Knopf, 1995). Bosket was a charming but violent child who was repeatedly placed in multiple treatment facilities in New York where he received therapy from some highly qualified mental health professionals in the mid-1970s. But he was invariably expelled, and finally ran away and committed a multiple murder, before being consigned, apparently for life, to the most restrictive confines of the criminal justice system.

Millham (under whose direction the Dartington Research Unit was conducting an extensive study of approved schools during this period)² testify that the dominant influence during Mary's early adolescence was her intense relationship with Red Bank's director, James Dixon. Thirty years later, Ms. Bell still says, "The world should be full of Mr. Dixons" (p. 141).

Mantel recounts these facts and then proceeds to draw the extraordinary conclusion that "...in Mary Bell's case, it was not treatment by experts but the simple passage of time that made her learn to control her impulses and live within society." If Dixon, longstanding director of a successful secure school, was not an expert—and a remarkably effective one—it is difficult to know who is. It is also difficult to understand how a novelist like Mantel can view human behavior as randomly resulting from "the simple passage of time," or how a serious publication like *The New York Review* can showcase an essay so naively oblivious to its own factual content.

The issue here is emphatically not academic. Mantel's readiness to dismiss in passing the life work of a James Dixon as irrelevant—even as she describes his success—explains why institutional child care was and remains a political, administrative, and intellectual backwater. The cur-

²See Spencer Millham, Roger Bullock, and Paul Charrett, *After Grace, Teeth: A Comprehensive Study of the Residential Experience of Boys in Approved Schools* (London, 1975). Rigorous sociological investigation of every conceivable parameter of institutional life in the entire range of "approved schools" for delinquent adolescents, and of outcome after discharge, led the authors to the conclusion that the single factor associated with positive outcome, irrespective of treatment philosophy or methodology, was the youngsters' recognition that the leadership and staff of the facility were actually committed to them.

rent tragicomic travails of New York's Administration for Children's Services, which still regularly fails to rescue the future Mary Bells from torture and death, is in fact the inexorable result of the same condescending ignorance masquerading as sophistication that is embodied in Mantel's casual comment that it doesn't really matter what anyone does anyway. Why pay child care workers as much as trash collectors, if what they do doesn't matter? In propagating this arrant nonsense, you should be aware that you and Mantel gratuitously are contributing your bit to undermining the arduous progress of the residential child care system.

Michael A. Pawel, M.D.

Executive Director
The August Aichhorn Center for
Adolescent Residential Care Inc.
New York City

Hilary Mantel replies:

Michael A. Pawel is wrong to think that I dismiss the work done by James Dixon of the Red Bank institution, in helping the child killer Mary Bell. From Mary's comments, as presented by Gitta Sereny, I deduce that he helped Mary because he was a wise adult who gave her security and understanding. The issue of his "expertise" is, in my view, beside the point. It is Gitta Sereny who insists that Mary lost out by not undergoing psychiatric treatment.

There is nothing naive in my belief that the passage of time helped Mary learn to control her impulses. This process is called growing up. It is not a "random" process, but generally predictable in its effects, and it requires no intervention by experts of any kind.

I do not know why Michael A. Pawel describes Mary Bell as an "eight-year old serial killer," since she was eleven years old at the time of her trial.

Celebrate **The Millennium** with a
David Levine 2000 Calendar

☒ **YES**, I would like to order the David Levine 2000 Calendar for only \$12, which includes postage and handling within the US and Canada. Orders outside North America should add \$3 per calendar for postage and handling.