

conspired to strip the family of its traditional functions—economic production, leisure, moral education, and religious education—and to minimize the practical and economic dependencies linking spouses, children, and parents to one another. Accordingly, in many families, sentiment is the only real tie that binds, even though—for many families—sentiment is much too fragile to serve as the basis for an enduring common life together. Thus, Carlson and Mero argue that we must re-functionalize the home—by encouraging measures such as home-based work and businesses, a “family wage” for parents who have to work outside the home, home schooling, and home-based care for elderly parents. In sum, the natural family will be renewed only when our economic and practical lives bind us more tightly to our spouses, children, and parents.

Third, an implicit if not always explicit message communicated by *The Natural Family* is that the Republican party and the larger pro-family movement have not

accomplished much in their three-decade effort to promote pro-life and pro-family policies. Carlson and Mero argue that the larger pro-family movement has been beset by squabbling, and a desire to go negative—that is, focus on the latest assault on family life—to keep the coffers full. Although they do not say much about the Republican party explicitly, they do point out that the average four-person family is now paying a lot more in taxes than it did in the 1950s—despite the fact that the Republicans have had numerous opportunities over the last 30 years to take a serious stab at remedying the tax burdens of families with children in the home. More fundamentally, they point out that most family-related social trends—from illegitimacy to pornography to the marriage rate—have worsened since the Republican party’s ascendancy started in 1980.

So what might be done to turn around the nation’s four-decade retreat from marriage? While acknowledging the importance of cultural renewal, Carlson and Mero present a number of creative public-policy ideas that would help renew the natural family.

On the legal front, they propose that state governments reintroduce “fault” into laws governing divorce—to give greater legal force to the marriage vow, to increase spouses’ confidence in their marriages, and to ensure that innocent spouses are not hit with the loss of property and child custody just because their spouse wants out of the marriage. On the tax front, the authors contend that the personal-income-tax exemption for children should be increased to \$5,000, that the current \$1,000 child tax credit should be indexed to inflation, and that families should be given generous tax credits for their Medicare and Social Security taxes when they are caring for children and elderly parents (20 percent for each child 13 and under, and 25 percent for each parent or grandparent in the home).

Policies such as these would lend legal and financial power to the natural family, and deepen the dependencies that sustain it. In turn, by shoring up the nation’s best department of health, human services, and justice—i.e., the natural family—these policies would reduce the need for the expansion of local, state, and federal government. Now there is a cause around which conservatives can unite. **NR**

■ MUSIC ■

# The Bard of Optimism

KYLE SMITH

I N a cab recently with a fellow critic, I found myself taking up the rusted cudgels of an argument I’ve been conducting with anyone who was willing, and many who were not, for 25 years. I suggested, possibly out of nowhere, that Paul McCartney was not only a genius in his field but *the* genius: the most essential member of the undisputed best musical group, the author of a huge volume of brilliant post-Beatles work, an evolving and important artist in his seventh decade—in short, the most monumental figure in pop music. My friend sniffed, “I find his recent work shallow.” I asked him what recent work he was referring to; he allowed that he had heard none of it. Still, he said, “I find his public persona to be shallow.”

Lennon fans know they’re on wobbly ground when they try to defend their man’s work—starting in 1966, as the Beatles were graduating from ditty merchants to a transformational force, every album contained more top-level McCartney compositions than Lennon ones. (The first side of *Sgt. Pepper*, for instance, contains seven classic songs—five written by McCartney. *Let It Be* contains three McCartney greats and one by Lennon. And so on.) “We got fed up with being sidemen for Paul,” Lennon said in 1970, but the gap in their achievements only widened when Lennon lost McCartney’s leadership.

So the Lennon legend trades heavily on his “public persona,” a mirror of how critics see themselves—angry, intellectual, political, up-to-the-minute, independent, informed, uncompromising, rebellious, pessimistic, complicated, caustic, ambivalent, experimental, important. McCartney is held to stand for the opposite of all of these things.

Mr. Smith, a film critic for the *New York Post*, blogs at [kylesmithonline.com](http://kylesmithonline.com).

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Lennon fans aren't wrong to link the personality and the artist, but they mistake trappings for wellsprings. McCartney was the one with the genuine artistic temperament, and because of this his work surpasses Lennon's. McCartney—unpretentious, industrious, determined, responsible, devoted to his family, undistracted by fads or marches—is driven to create beauty, out of suburbia ("Penny Lane"), his mother's death ("Let It Be"), or Lennon's murder (the 1982 ballad "Here Today"). He approaches his calling the way true artists do: as a job.

Calling McCartney shallow is itself shallow, and anyone who thinks he is a has-been has ignored his recent album, *Memory Almost Full*, and two other excellent discs he's released in the last decade. These recordings have brought his entire career into focus: He is not a fool on the hill but a resourceful optimist who chooses to resist despair.

If any rocker has earned the right to snarl, it's McCartney. Breast cancer took away both of the most important women in his life: his mother, when he was 14, and his wife Linda, 42 years later. His closest friend dumped him (Lennon, not McCartney, was the one who ended the Beatles, though this was not publicly known at the time). This is McCartney, the supposed blithe candyman, reflecting on the breakup in a 1984 *Playboy* interview:

I was on the scrap heap. . . . It was just the feeling, the terrible disappointment of not being of any use to anyone anymore. It was a barrelling, empty feeling that just rolled across my soul. . . . It was bad on Linda. She had to deal with this guy who didn't particularly want to get out of bed, and, if he did, wanted to go to bed pretty soon after. He wanted to drink earlier and earlier each day and didn't really see the point in shaving, because where was he going?

McCartney crawled out of the hole by forming Wings: "The answer to losing your job," he figured, is, "well, let's try to get another job." Lennon may have been a professional outlaw who wrote "Attica State," but McCartney is the one who actually did time—nine days in Japan in 1980 after a pot bust. Though McCartney remembered his incarceration as "hell," he played up the comedy: "Well, I'd seen *Bridge on the River Kwai*: I knew what

you had to do when you were a prisoner of war! You had to laugh a lot and keep cheery and keep yourself up. . . . The first thing I expected was rape. That was my big fear. Right? Wouldn't that be yours? So I slept with me back to the wall."

Like his critics, McCartney has wondered whether a happy marriage was keeping his work light—"I suppose if you did get a bit content, then you might not write savage lyrics and stuff," he once said. But savageness weighed down Lennon; his most vicious tunes are often his most vacuous, and "Woman is the Nigger of the World," "God," and "Working Class Hero" amount to silly hate songs. *National Lampoon* dubbed Lennon's early-Seventies work "Magical Misery Tour." Lennon was taking lead and turning it into lead. Then nothing was heard from him for five years; in the same

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### SOMEDAY TO FUJI

Let's someday fly to Fuji's isle.  
I'll wear a knee-length, knotted gown  
of crepe in blues and periwinkles  
with you blasé in brown.

The foreign tongue will be a thing  
I've neither studied nor discussed  
with you. You'll speak it fluently,  
and I will need to trust

your judgment in hotel and market  
for bargaining, respect, and bread—  
a fair price for a silken fan,  
a maid to make the bed.

Nowhere is there a local ridge  
I've wished to climb or photograph.  
Their scales and shapes seem cause  
to wince,  
their legends cause to laugh;

their levels, by comparison  
with rises I cannot attain  
inferior, somehow—their flora,  
*gauche*,  
their beauty, plain.

But Fuji, with its strange  
profoundness,  
mythology, cognition, mist,  
lies far—like love which must be kept  
exotic to exist.

—JENNIFER REESER

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period, McCartney released five top-ten albums.

In the last decade, age and tragedy have challenged McCartney. He has responded with three of the best six albums of his entire post-Beatles career: *Flaming Pie* (1997), *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard* (2005), and this summer's *Memory Almost Full*. (His other indispensable albums: 1989's *Flowers in the Dirt*, 1973's *Band on the Run*, and 1982's *Tug of War*.) Lately misfortune has performed the role Lennon once did—roughing up his sanded edges. While Linda was dying in 1997, McCartney released *Flaming Pie*, whose peppy lyrics were belied by dark musical shadings, minor keys, and a wary singing style. In several songs, a line or two hint at what the McCartneys were up against: "Somedays I cry, I cry for those who fear the worst" ("Somedays"); "Life, as it happens / Nobody warns you / Willow, hold on tight" ("Little Willow"). Throughout, there is a will to force a positive outcome: "When you're wide awake / Say it for goodness' sake / It's gonna be a great day" ("Great Day").

After Linda's death, McCartney rushed into a marriage to the former model Heather Mills and declared he was fine. The 2001 album *Driving Rain* showered praise on Mills. But on 2005's *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard*, which was released just months before McCartney's divorce became public, the lyrics seemed to acknowledge both that he had made a mistake in marrying Mills and that he had not fully dealt with his loss. The jaunty first line on *Chaos*, "There is a fine line between recklessness and courage," is a jibe aimed at himself, and redolent of his collaborations with Lennon. The album is magnificent, McCartney's best since the 1980s. He was testing the psychic equipment that had prepared him for this moment his whole life, and the struggle had become larger than himself: If the eternal optimist can't rebuild himself, who can?

Here is the irrepressible one dealing with loneliness for the first time, in "Friends to Go": "I've been waiting on the other side / For your friends to leave so I don't have to hide / I'd prefer they didn't know." "English Tea" may be McCartney's finest ballad since "Maybe I'm Amazed": Musically, it has the muted beauty of *Rubber Soul*; lyrically its chip-



Before the ice caps melt,  
before the rainforests  
disappear, before  
it's too late!—strap on  
your bike helmet, take a  
left at Kyoto, and head  
straight to . . .

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abreast of all the  
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and his holier-than-  
thou gang of  
greenpeacenik  
planet-savers.

per Englishness, in the playful spirit of “When I’m 64,” plays against the shadows to sublime effect. Other ballads—“Too Much Rain,” “A Certain Softness”—have both the melodic intensity and the restraint of such mid-period Beatles ballads as “For No One.”

This year’s haunting album, *Memory Almost Full*, includes the darkest song of McCartney’s career, “The End of the End.” Here he is confident of an afterlife yet confronts finality:

On the day that I die,  
I’d like bells to be rung  
And songs that were sung  
To be hung out like blankets  
That lovers have played on  
And laid on while listening  
To songs that were sung.

It’s a lapidary song that goes beyond the groovy flower-child sloganeering of McCartney’s similar Beatles song “The End” to approach death with both unusual frankness and a stirring optimism that takes comfort in accomplishment and the gifts we hand down to others.

As if acknowledging that, in the end, McCartney had it right, Lennon himself left the world and rejoined his family. In 1980, after an 18-month separation from Ono, after a love affair, bed-ins, est, and protest, he recorded—for his final album, *Double Fantasy*—his most sincere, mature, timeless songs. They are about himself, his wife, and his child: “Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy),” “Woman,” “(Just Like) Starting Over,” and “Watching the Wheels.” Like McCartney’s works, they are heavily produced, melodic, gorgeous pop songs.

Their praise of homey pleasures and simple optimism represents a defection from the countercultural magic kingdom that Lennon and Ono had enthusiastically ruled but the McCartneys shunned. Ono, speaking of *Double Fantasy* weeks before her husband’s death in 1980, said, “John has talked about the Sixties and how it gave us a sense for freedom—sexual and otherwise. It was like an orgy. . . . Men and women somehow lost track of each other and a lot of families and relationships split apart. . . . We tried to rationalize it as the price we were paying for our freedom.” Lennon’s last work is not a period piece, but a return to lasting cultural and musical values—the values Paul McCartney never left behind. **NR**

■ FILM ■

## Re: Bourne

ROSS DOUTHAT

**T**HE Left owns the movie industry, but conservatives can take some solace in the fact that two of Hollywood’s most profitable genres are right-wing to the core. I speak, of course, of the horror movie and the action film. (Evelyn Waugh they ain’t, but at least they’re something.) In between the gore and the goosebumps, horror flicks undercut the arrogance of scientism, punish promiscuity, and vindicate the truth claims of religion. (If you’re looking for silver-screen condemnations of Seventies permissiveness, you could do worse than to start with *The Exorcist* and finish up with *Halloween*.) Action movies, meanwhile, are islands of patriotism, moral clarity, and—I kid you not—geopolitical realism in a sea of Left Coast anti-Americanism.

Think about it: Didn’t *Red Dawn* offer a more accurate depiction of Soviet Communism than *Reds*? Wasn’t *True Lies* ultimately a more realistic portrait of the threat posed by radical Islam than *Syriana*? Didn’t the James Bond movies come closer to the truth about the Cold War than a thousand disillusioned productions like last year’s *The Good Shepherd*? Wasn’t *Predator* a more serious take on the dangers posed by interstellar visitors than the egregiously pacifistic *E.T.*?

Okay, maybe scratch that last one. But the point stands: Liberals like their heroes rumpled and white-collared and speaking-truth-to-power, Robert Redford-style, not armed and dangerous and ready to take on the terrorists or Communists by whatever means are ready to hand. All of which makes Jason Bourne, the CIA-created death-dealer who’s back for more close-quarters mayhem in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, such a remarkable creation. He’s the first great left-wing action hero: James Bond for *Nation* readers, a John McClane that even Noam Chomsky can love.

This isn’t just because the Bourne movies’ politics are a farrago of CIA-bashing joined to post-9/11 paranoia. It’s

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