

# Books & the Arts.

## The Generalist

by THOMAS MEANEY

**P**icture him as a legend, Joan of Arc in drag.

A great nation is conquered by its historic enemy and the General is forced to flee. From a foreign shore, he rouses his people to resistance. Four years later, he marches through the capital in triumph, determined to reunite a country torn apart by faction. But these are democratic times, and he requires more power than the Constitution allows. The people balk at his requests. After a long tug of war, he retreats to his country estate. The nation fails to heal, and its colonies begin to seethe with discontent; the people agitate for the General's return, and he answers their call. He makes the nation great again—and, in an unexpected twist, he unravels the empire in the name of universal liberation. The nation becomes a shining example of how to conduct international affairs in a new world, as the General charts an independent course between two rival superpowers. But the people fail to acknowledge their debt to him. Only after they have pushed him out of power for the last time do they come to see him as their savior.

This is more or less how Charles de Gaulle wanted to be remembered, and against considerable odds he very nearly achieved his wish. De Gaulle, who died in 1970, was the most polarizing figure in France during his lifetime—half of the country hated him and more than a few tried to kill him—but his story has become a kind of collective fairy tale that the French have agreed to believe in. The resurgence of his reputation might have surprised the Vichy collaborators who dismissed him as a rebel in 1940, or the generation that demanded the end of his rule in 1968, or the electorate that swept his longtime antagonist, the Socialist François Mitterrand, into power in 1981. It would not, however, have surprised the General. “Everyone has been, is, or will be a Gaullist,” he once declared, and so it seems to have come to pass. On the major questions of how France should orient itself toward the world, the cardinal points



DOUG CHAYKA

of the compass remain de Gaulle's. In the French presidential election earlier this year, both main contenders claimed the Gaullian mantle: the incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy, by parading his shoddy version of “grandeur” on the international stage, and his Socialist challenger François Hollande, by fitting out his campaign with fulsome tributes to de Gaulle. Even Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front, who did not survive the first round of

### In the Shadow of the General

*Modern France and the Myth of de Gaulle.*

By Sudhir Hazareesingh.

Oxford. 238 pp. \$29.95.

voting, has conceded that while she's “not a Gaullist,” she is “certainly Gaullian.”

The myth of de Gaulle is all the more remarkable considering the number of contradictions it has absorbed. The French

---

Thomas Meaney, a doctoral candidate in history at Columbia University, is an editor of The Utopian.

Army commander who grew up in a Catholic household spent most of his career squaring off against the military and the church. The leader who desperately clung to the French empire in the 1940s vigorously dismantled it in the 1960s. The patriot who evinced skepticism toward supranational institutions is now sometimes hailed as a visionary of the European Union.

Consider, too, the array of admirers de Gaulle has attracted: men of the left like Régis Debray, who converted from Guevarism to Gaullism in a Bolivian jail; men of the right like Henry Kissinger, who has told Americans to become students of the French statesman; Osama bin Laden, who liked to quote from de Gaulle's *War Mem-*

its edge, keeping France in the front rank. De Gaulle achieved this in part by assigning the vague but supple notion of "grandeur" to whatever condition he wished to equate with the national interest. In this sense de Gaulle was, as he liked to refer to himself, "a poet of action," though not always in the way he intended. His enduring political achievement was to persuade broad swaths of the French public that he had restored the nation to greatness when, in real terms, the French Republic was becoming a less powerful place.

By putting de Gaulle's persona above the man himself, Hazareesingh has trespassing into the territory cultivated twenty years ago by the historian Pierre Nora and the scholars Nora assembled to write

the monumental three-volume history of French national memory, *Les Lieux de mémoire*. For Nora, the vying memories of postwar France were communism, which disappeared with barely a trace, and Gaul-

lism, the traces of which are everywhere. But rather than accounting for the origins of these mythologies, Nora took it as his duty to safeguard the memory of them from the demystifying ambitions of other, more conventional historians. "Memory is always suspicious in the eyes of history, whose true mission is to demolish it," he wrote. In a country that supposedly likes to think of its past as unified and seamless, Nora's desire to rescue buried traditions is perhaps understandable, though at times it risked reducing *Les Lieux de mémoire* to an elegiac inventory of the ideological bric-a-brac of French national life.

In the case of de Gaulle, Hazareesingh shows that Nora's line between myth and history cannot be drawn too neatly. De Gaulle was more adept at using historical symbols—and forging new ones—than any figure in modern French history. In his *Memoirs*, press conferences and masterful televised addresses, he was able to put forward a version of certain events—the Liberation, the Algerian War, the founding of the Common Market—that decisively shaped their outcomes. By poring over his prolific correspondence with the public, Hazareesingh reveals how de Gaulle appeared in the minds of ordinary French men and women. The result is a nimble study that revels in de Gaulle's uncanny feel for the national pulse and grasps the reasons for his enduring appeal. This is rare, for a surprising number of contemporary historians are still caught in his thrall: they see de Gaulle as a grand

strategist operating above domestic partisan constraints, with his mind fixed on the fate of France and Europe. The only shortcoming of *In the Shadow of the General* is that Hazareesingh doesn't push his demystifying impulse far enough against this last illusion.

To appreciate the power that de Gaulle still exercises over the French imagination, it helps to recall the state of sheer powerlessness in which he found himself in 1940. As the son of a minor aristocratic family that refused to sing "La Marseillaise," he was not an obvious candidate for protector of the Republic. As Hazareesingh stresses, only a very small number of people actually tuned in to de Gaulle's now legendary BBC broadcast of June 18, in which he called on the French to resist the German occupation and declared himself de facto head of state. The Resistance itself was already a myth in the making: though many reacted negatively to the collaboration of Marshal Pétain and his Vichy regime with Hitler, de Gaulle was able to count on only a smattering of rebels in the cities, a handful of anti-Vichy colonies, and an island of Breton fisherman who heeded his orders and rowed across the channel. As for the Allies, they treated de Gaulle with contempt. Franklin Roosevelt referred to him as "the Bride" and "Joan of Arc" and at one point tried packing him off to Madagascar to serve as its governor. Churchill, though closer temperamentally to de Gaulle, made no bones about where the interests of Britain lay: "Each time we must choose between Europe and the open sea, we shall always choose the open sea. Each time I must choose between you and Roosevelt, I shall choose Roosevelt."

With friends like these, de Gaulle was forced to create international legitimacy out of nothing—a peculiar form of political legerdemain at which he excelled. Two examples will suffice. Less than a year after Pétain had made his peace with Hitler, de Gaulle sent an expeditionary force to capture Saint Pierre and Miquelon, the two pro-Vichy islands off the coast of Newfoundland. The attack enraged the Americans and Canadians, who were shocked to see a prospective ally meddling in their backyard, but the operation succeeded in turning the motley Free French soldiers into an actual (if largely symbolic) fighting force, and it also pressured the Allies to be more forthright in their support of the Resistance.

But nothing better captures de Gaulle's gift for political theater than the liberation of Paris in May 1944, when he persuaded Gen. Dwight Eisenhower to allow the Free

## De Gaulle was more adept at using historical symbols than any figure in modern France.

oirs; Newt Gingrich, who compared his time in the political wilderness in the 2000s to de Gaulle's retirement to Colombey-les-Deux-Églises in the 1950s; and Yasir Arafat, who at diplomatic summits made a point of sporting the Cross of Lorraine sent to him by de Gaulle. In his sharp new contribution to Gaullology, *In the Shadow of the General*, Oxford historian Sudhir Hazareesingh tells of a French filmmaker in a remote corner of Bengal stumbling upon a group of Naxalite guerrillas, who greeted him by shouting a tribute to the French president's famous anti-imperialist speech in Cambodia in 1966: "De Gaulle-Phnom Penh!" As de Gaulle told the novelist André Malraux, who served as his minister of cultural affairs, "In the end, you know, my only international rival is Tintin!... No one has ever noticed that, because of my size."

How is this global Gaullian phenomenon to be explained? Hazareesingh argues that the answer lies, naturally enough, somewhere between the perfect storm in French political life that made consensus around de Gaulle possible and the French statesman's skill at navigating the crosswinds. "For de Gaulle is the only great national mythical figure who not only had a sense of history," Hazareesingh writes, "but was himself moving in the direction of history." The genius of de Gaulle was less that he made history happen, Hazareesingh contends, than that he was able to give the impression that he was always operating at



French Forces to enter the city ahead of the Allies (the US strategic command agreed, on the condition that no black French soldiers be part of the pageantry). After striding down the Champs-Élysées, de Gaulle first visited his old office at the Defense Ministry—where he later claimed that “not a rug, not a curtain had been disturbed”—before making a speech at the Hôtel de Ville, where he proclaimed that there was no need to restore the Republic because “it had never ceased to exist.” By dramatizing a sense of national continuity when little of one remained, de Gaulle in effect encouraged his countrymen to forget the dark years of Vichy, which they were more than happy to do.

De Gaulle's provisional government of 1944-46 was adamant about three issues: strengthening the French empire, rebuilding the devastated national economy and making the fractured nation whole. On each of these fronts, de Gaulle adopted positions that he would reverse completely in the 1960s. Throughout the war, Roosevelt had urged the French to prepare for decolonization, but de Gaulle resisted. At a conference in Brazzaville in 1944—sometimes mistakenly taken as the inception of de Gaulle's anti-imperialist phase—he called for a series of reforms that would knit far-flung pieces of the empire closer together. The French were soon setting the pace for colonial violence: in 1945, thousands were massacred in the northern Algerian city of Sétif in order to crush a bloody rebellion and secure the Mediterranean foothold; in 1946, the French Navy shelled the harbor of Haiphong, killing thousands of Vietnamese; and the following year, the French Army—now under the watch of socialist Paul Ramadier—suppressed the Malagasy Uprising, in which some 80,000 Madagascarans were killed, all in the name of keeping the French Union intact. Far from acknowledging these atrocities, however, de Gaulle either breezed over them in his *Memoirs* or ignored them altogether. He would later call for the independence of all three nations.

While the US leadership grudgingly came to accept the revival of the French empire as a necessity for France's economic recovery, de Gaulle undertook a drastic laissez-faire policy in 1948 that sent inflation soaring for much of the period that followed. But if anything characterizes his economic strategy over the long term, it was his constant shuttling between a commitment to trade liberalization and the protectionist policies that earned him his reputation as an indomitable statist. His crowning economic achievement, the establishment of the European Economic

# WHY A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP MIGHT BE ANYTHING BUT



*"Matthew Wolf-Meyer probes the current state of sleep medicine as well as its absorbing history. At a time when modern society's dependence on sleeping pills and plush bedding has never been greater, *The Slumbering Masses* is all the more welcome for its ambitious compass and penetrating insights."*

—A. Roger Ekirch, author of *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*

\$24.95 hardcover, 312 pages

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

Available at better bookstores or to order call 800-621-2736  
www.upress.umn.edu

MINNESOTA

## HOW TO FIND THE JOB YOU WANT, AT ANY AGE!

### YOU CAN'T FALL OFF THE FLOOR!

Reinvention Guide to Re-Inventing Yourself and Your Career

189 Proven Secret Tips to Business Success Through Re-Invention



Steve Blacker and Charles Goldberg

Re-Invent yourself and your career.

Learn how to market your skill set to find a job when none seem to exist.

Author Steve Blacker has re-invented himself more than 25 times during a successful 50-year career that is still going strong today. He shares 189 key lessons learned in this easy-to-follow practical guide to achieving specific career goals.

**SPECIAL OFFER TO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ**

Go to [Blacker-Reinventions.com](http://Blacker-Reinventions.com) to order the book, and use the promotional code YCP08 to earn a 30% discount and receive a signed copy.

Community (EEC) in 1957, now appears in retrospect to have been the first step in securing Franco-German dominance over the European economic system. On the political front, de Gaulle's grand vision was for a postwar republic centered on a strong president elected by Parliament and free from the grip of political parties. When it became clear that the people would reject such a concentration of power—it reeked of Bonapartism—de Gaulle formed his own version of a political movement, which he called not a party but “the gathering of the French people.” At a time when fascism was still thriving in Europe, “the gathering” was viewed by many as an ominous force. But de Gaulle made surprisingly little use of it. Instead, he performed the first of his

delicate man who remembered every slight he ever suffered.

**T**he old-fashioned turns of phrase in the *Memoirs* may have drawn smirks from the generation of 1968, but its substance marked a major break with the dominant worldview of the French right. “The book decisively rejects fatalism,” writes Hazareesingh, “seeking to regenerate the republican tradition and rebuild the political and social order by means of a centralized civil power capable of avoiding the excesses of the previous Republics.” There are no hymns to the peasantry in the *Memoirs*, no hostility to rationalism, no glorification of God, no aristocratic disdain for the state. From its opening line, with its faint echo of Proust, de Gaulle sounds a distinctive note: “All my life I have had a certain idea of France.” For him, France has always been an abstraction, a view partly attributable to the time he spent seeing the country from the

outside during the war. As the historian Julian Jackson has argued, de Gaulle was an “existential nationalist” whose idea of France was bound up with whatever particular position he happened to be committed to at any given moment. “Grandeur” for him was a moveable feast: what was “grand” for France in the 1940s—holding on to its empire at all costs—could be traded in for a new conception in the 1960s, when casting off the colonies suddenly seemed imperative. The power of the *Memoirs* derives from de Gaulle's determination to smooth out the unruly contingencies of his time into providential history, in which providence was always heading wherever de Gaulle was leading France.

By 1958, as copies of the *Memoirs* were selling briskly, the Fourth Republic was in a tailspin. French forces had been routed at Dien Bien Phu, French designs had been thwarted at Suez, and the government faced a revolt of the officer corps in Algeria. It was just the sort of crisis de Gaulle needed. In a series of stealth maneuvers, he took control of the government in what appeared to many as the sort of coup d'état that Generalísimo Franco could have applauded (and we know that the outright overthrow of the regime was an option entertained by de Gaulle). Nevertheless, when it came to Algeria, de Gaulle worked with remarkable finesse. First, he placated the *pieds-noirs*, the French colonial community in Algeria, with his ambiguous “*Je vous ai compris*” speech in Algiers in June 1958. (Whipped into a frenzy at finally having been

“understood” by the metropole, the *pieds-noirs* mistakenly assumed this meant de Gaulle would honor their grievances.) Then, realizing within the year that the war was lost, he began making noises about *Algérie algérienne* and edged toward negotiations for a peace.

In the end, de Gaulle had never had a “certain idea” of Algeria except to be rid of the country, and by the time his government was willing to make vague offers of more political representation for Algerian Muslims, it was too late. In any case, de Gaulle was not about to let Algerians immigrate en masse into France or, as he joked, to see the name of his home town changed to “Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées.” The price of withdrawal from Algeria was steep for de Gaulle, but worth paying: it earned him the eternal hatred of the *pieds-noirs*, who felt betrayed, but it also reversed France's position in international politics. By the early 1960s, de Gaulle was chiding the Americans for not drawing down faster in Vietnam.

If the credo of the Gaullian myth was that “France is not really herself unless in the front rank,” then France could be no one's lackey—especially not the United States'. Throughout the postwar period, the “grandeur” of de Gaulle's France was predicated on carving out an independent course vis-à-vis the new global superpower while establishing its own unsupervised relationship with the Soviet Union. With this in mind, de Gaulle undertook a series of seemingly daring initiatives. In 1960, France tested its first atomic bomb after demanding that all foreign forces and nuclear installations be removed from the country. De Gaulle further aggravated the White House by insisting that France's nuclear arsenal would have its warheads pointed “in all directions,” because “one did not know from where the next threat would come.” In 1965, he demanded that the US Treasury exchange France's dollars for gold from Fort Knox, openly challenging the economic dominance of the US currency. In 1966, he withdrew France from NATO, insisting the country could never be under anyone else's command.

But all of this reshuffling amounted to little more than a series of gestures meant to please de Gaulle's domestic audience. The Eisenhower administration was relieved at no longer having to station forces in France and pleased to see the French taking responsibility for their nuclear defense. Meanwhile, de Gaulle's call for a return to the gold standard failed to win favor internationally (and earned him the epithet “de Gaullefinger” in the American press), while his supposed pullout from NATO was little more than a public-

## The price of withdrawal from Algeria was steep for de Gaulle, but worth paying.

many vanishing acts, returning to Colombey in 1948 to write his memoirs and watch from the sidelines as the French Fourth Republic foundered.

The three volumes of de Gaulle's *War Memoirs*, written from 1949 to 1958, remain the central planks of Gaullist mythology. “If the years of the Resistance and the Liberation gave birth to the Gaullian legend,” writes Hazareesingh, “it was undoubtedly the *War Memoirs* that carried it over the baptismal font.” The volumes accomplished this feat by becoming de Gaulle's primary means of communication with his supporters during his long internal exile. He knew that his absence could be more powerful than his presence, and the policy of splendid isolation he conducted in the 1950s kept him above the fray throughout the follies of the Fourth Republic and crystallized his reputation as “the Man of the 18th of June.” In effect, de Gaulle assumed the part of Coriolanus, ready to return only when the country was on its knees, begging for him to do so. But the *Memoirs* would not still be read today—and form part of the standard *lycée* syllabus—were it not for de Gaulle's justly famous style. By meting out his romantic vision of France in cool, classical sentences, he fashioned one of the great works of twentieth-century French prose. The reader of the *Memoirs* takes in world events from an incredibly high altitude—with de Gaulle slipping in and out of the third person—until the bursts of turbulence come, reminders that the author is a



ity stunt, padded with covert agreements that effectively kept it within the military alliance—which in any case had never stipulated that any member's forces would come under supranational command. De Gaulle's anti-imperialist tirades at Phnom Penh may have aggravated the Johnson administration, but the cooler heads at State knew that they could count on him when the cold war chips were down (after all, de Gaulle had given President Kennedy unstinting support during the Cuban missile crisis). As the political scientist Marc Trachtenberg has pointed out, regardless of how much de Gaulle publicly blamed the White House for the cold war division of Europe, his underlying views were remarkably consonant with US policy in the 1960s: neither wanted a nuclear Germany, both agreed that Western Europe needed US defense, and both were determined to limit Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

One of the few persistent myths about de Gaulle that Hazareesingh leaves unexplored is how he managed to acquire his reputation as a grand strategist among today's historians and policy-makers. "I believe that sooner or later the United States will have to develop some operational concept of the national interest. And when that happens, we will have to be, whether we like it or not, students of de Gaulle," remarked Henry Kissinger in a breathless 1990 tribute. But any close inspection of de Gaulle's policies reveals an implacably pragmatic politician who was as much constrained by domestic pressures as any leader of the period. De Gaulle never hesitated to delay his grand plans for Europe in order to satisfy more local concerns, as when he held the EEC hostage to the whims of French farmers. (De Gaulle threatened to leave the Common Market unless it included the massive subsidies he thought were necessary for the modernization of French agriculture.) That the political scientist Andrew Moravcsik was roundly dismissed by scholars across the spectrum for showing this more mundane side of de Gaulle is indicative of the reverence he still commands. Hazareesingh, who has written a study of Napoleon, takes every opportunity to compare de Gaulle and Bonaparte, who admittedly shared a similar national stature in their respective centuries. But here the difference between the unconstrained executive and the democratically elected politician comes into full view: unlike Napoleon, de Gaulle was a man of limits. Each time he could have reached for extraordinary powers—1946, 1958 and 1968—de Gaulle refrained. Never one to force a Waterloo, he was a general content with one star and one country.

The other, stranger side of the Gaullian myth is the love affair that de Gaulle enjoys with the French left. Why do so many *soixante-huitards* who once spoke of him in the same breath as Franco and Salazar now revere him? A whole phalanx of French leftists—Debray; Serge July, the founder of *Libération*; Max Gallo, author of a novelized biography of de Gaulle—have quasi-religious views of his political powers. "In my dreams I am on terms of easy familiarity with Louis XI, with Lenin, Edison and Lincoln," writes Debray, with a characteristically bloated sense of proportion, in his apologetic homage, *Charles de Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation* (1994). "But I quail before de Gaulle. He is the Great Other, the inaccessible absolute." For Debray, de Gaulle was not only the last great Frenchman but "the archetypal non-trendy"—one who holds out the lesson that the French left, despite its inveterate suspicion of great men, cannot do without them. Lacking de Gaulle's readiness to use the full power of the state, his gift for incorporating dissidents into a consensus, as well as his sense of "the worldwide dynamic of peoples," the left, Debray argues, "missed its rendezvous" with the hero it deserved. In the figure of de Gaulle, Debray not only found a sterling example of republican moral rectitude but the ideal counterpoint to Mitterrand, that Socialist Frankenstein assembled piece by piece in the Gaullian shadow, who liquidated the French left and sent it in search of a new fetish.

Then again, to blame Mitterrand is perhaps too easy a way to explain why the Gaullian legend has taken such strong root. Ever since de Gaulle stood up against fascism and refused to buy into the murky justifications for collaboration, it has been possible to be a left-wing Gaullist in good standing in France. Unlike his right-leaning offspring, de Gaulle's political agenda always incorporated leftist components, which could be traced back to his sympathy for the social program of the Resistance and his view of himself as standing above petty divisions. Even after Gaullism became a garden-variety European right-wing movement under Georges Pompidou, the Gaullian myth has been able to accommodate leftists like Debray whose ideologies have petered out. Meanwhile, "social Gaullism"—a dissident form of right-wing nationalism that calls for France to turn its back on the EU and globalization—shows no signs of weakening. The irony is that de Gaulle presided over many of the changes that made this sort of nostalgia possible. The rapid modernization and centralization of the country, the founding of the EEC, the further secularization

Feel like your  
brand of  
politics isn't  
welcomed at the  
dinner table?



It's embraced at ours.  
Welcome aboard.  
You're on the *Nation Cruise*.

**THE NATION'S**  
15th Annual Seminar Cruise  
**December 9-16, 2012**  
7-Night Western Caribbean Cruise  
HOLLAND AMERICA LINE: Nieuw Amsterdam

**SPECIAL GUESTS**



**KATRINA  
VANDEN  
HEUVEL**



**VICTOR  
NAVASKY**



**CHRIS  
HAYES**



**JOAN  
BAEZ**

For more information or  
to book your cruise:  
**[www.NationCruise.com](http://www.NationCruise.com)**  
or call (800) 707-1634  
[groups@the-cruise-authority.com](mailto:groups@the-cruise-authority.com)

of French education—all of these changes hastened the vanishing of much about France that de Gaulle himself held dear.

Today, it is hard not to view the France of the past decade as a parody of its postwar self. The country that was once the unique preserve of the most diverse political and intellectual fauna in the West, and whose revolutionary heritage inspired the world, has become a kind of cultural funhouse. In the place of Jean-Paul Sartre, the public face of French intellectual life is now Bernard-Henri Lévy, who casts himself as preener in chief for military interventions around the world when he is not unloading tripe on talk shows. The high tide of French cinema has ebbed into a film scene obsessed with the rituals of French family life and its own

cultural sterility in a global film market. In the place of the General, who made a show of personally paying his own electricity bill at the Elysée, there was until recently Sarkozy, a leader passionately devoted to his own profligacy and philistinism. Sounding like a poor man's Charles de Gaulle, he once boasted, "For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to do something." Whatever the hopes of Debray and company, the Gaullist myth has become a snugly blanket in which anyone and everyone can wrap themselves.

This may be the price of the General's triumph, but then he did not always expect much. When asked what the French would do without him, de Gaulle quoted Proverbs: "They will return to their own vomit." ■

## A Form of Order

by MARINA HARSS

"I can sometimes sense certain things...it's hard to explain. It started very early, when I was a child—I moved schools a lot and lived in a lot of places and learned very quickly how to sense who was the class bully." So says Paul Taylor in a soft, languorous voice, after a pause. Any conversation with the 82-year-old choreographer—who lives in splendid isolation in an old house on the North Fork of Long Island for all but a few months of the year, when he is making new dances at the studios of the Paul Taylor Dance Company on Manhattan's Lower East Side—is a bit like a game of hide-and-seek. He is gentlemanly and friendly, but not easy to draw out.

Taylor has been involved in modern dance for six decades; he is frequently referred to, in portentous tones, as the last of the great choreographers. Sadly, that characterization is probably true: Martha Graham died in 1991, and Merce Cunningham in 2009. Who else is there? The dance world has moved on. Rare is the choreographer who builds a unique, personal vocabulary of movement, a signature style brought into play in piece after piece, or who can sustain a regular stable of dancers—at least in the United States, where funding for such enterprises is nearly nonexistent. (Mark Morris is the exception,

but he is eclectic by nature.) Building upon the innovations of Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Pina Bausch and others, contemporary dance is awash in collaborative creation, improvisational techniques, and the blending of dance and theater, all of which bear little resemblance to modern dance. Taylor continues to work in what is now a bygone mode. His company boasts sixteen dancers, a building of its own, and a large and growing collection of props and costumes; it also provides health insurance for its dancers and has bookings for most of the year. As for the dances, except for the odd passage here and there, Taylor alone conceives the ideas and the steps, and he is wont to describe the culture of the company as a "benevolent dictatorship." In other words, Paul Taylor Dance Company is an institution, and a successful one: in 2012, its fifty-eighth year of existence, it had its first season at Lincoln Center in New York and sold more tickets than ever before. By the end of the year, it will have visited forty-two cities across the country. Its dances are also performed by companies like American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet and Miami City Ballet, and its own junior troupe, composed of six dancers, tours even more widely.

Taylor's teachers included Graham, José Limón and Antony Tudor. In 1959, George Balanchine, arguably the greatest ballet choreographer of the last century, created a solo for him in *Episodes*, for which he famously asked Taylor to move "like fly in glass of milk." He also offered Taylor a

place in his company, New York City Ballet, an invitation the dancer never considered. (For all ballet's late-twentieth-century rapprochement with modern dance, it is highly unlikely that such an offer would be made today.) To the headstrong Taylor, ballet had no appeal: it was a creaky pile of "frou-frou" and "stiff-necked pretensions" that relied on a finicky technique and groomed a dancer to look "decorative, like a hollow person." Modern dance, in contrast, held out the promise of momentum, weighted gesture and some deeper form of relevance.

Taylor joined Graham's company in 1955 and stayed for seven years, usually dancing the parts of ominous, villainous characters in works like *Clytemnestra*, *Phaedra* and *Night Journey*. Graham had a profound influence on Taylor's style as a choreographer; like him, she believed that dance should communicate ideas and feelings, and his dances, like hers, are frank about sexual desire. On a more physical level, he uses contractions—roundings of the back initiated by the intake of breath, a basic staple of the Graham technique. As he likes to point out, he even lifted a step, a kind of gliding run with arms swinging, from one of the first Graham pieces he saw. "I still think of her often," he told me. But the grandiosity of her dances and her persona eventually drove him away: too much melodrama, too many psychological hang-ups. And she talked too much in rehearsal: "we would sit and listen and get cold. I try not to do that."

By all accounts Taylor, who is tall (six feet), was an extraordinary dancer. The critic Clive Barnes once described how he loped "his way through the undergrowths of theatricality like an indolent antelope, with a jump and a twist, a muscular awareness of kinetic fact so that one was never sure which came first, the impulse or the move." He came to dancing at 20, impossibly late, while studying painting at Syracuse on a swimming scholarship. He swam freestyle, which explains some of the extreme range of motion in his shoulders and back, as well as the almost aquatic texture of his movements. Each dance technique has a certain feel. Ballet seeks an aerial quality; Graham sought movement that felt grounded and monumental; Cunningham wanted clarity and speed; Taylor's style is muscular and fluid. "I always loved the water," he told me, "to be in it and the pressure you needed to use against it when you swam. When I danced, I imagined that pressure, as if the air were like water." Watching a Taylor dance, one can almost feel the resistance in one's own body. Given his late start, one can only assume that Taylor's extraordinary coordina-

*Marina Harss is a dance writer and translator. Her recent translation of Élisabeth Gille's The Mirador was awarded the 2012 French-American Foundation and Florence Gould Foundation prize.*