

Six Very Brief Reviews of Historical Works

By Armando Simón

Cardinal Richelieu: And the Making of France by Anthony Levi

This book was written by a former Jesuit, which is advantageous because Jesuits are renowned for their intelligence and scholarship and secondly because he deals at some length with the religious aspect of the Cardinal which other biographers pay lip service to. The Cardinal's influence on French literature is also dealt with at length. Having said that, the author is frankly enamored of his subject. To be sure, there is no question that Richelieu was a fascinating and complex historical figure. As a major player in the cataclysmic Thirty Years' War, Richelieu should be roasting in hell for a long time to come. I wonder if his constant maladies may have been psychosomatic in character (he aided Protestants against Catholics).

There is a lot of detail here, some of it tedious to be sure, and the narrative is labyrinthic to the point that one needs a scorecard. Particularly irritating was the prevalence of treason among the aristocracy; this was the time before the French monarchy became absolute. Some of the treason involved sex, always a fun subject.

In reading this book, one should also read a companion piece, a biography of the Cardinal's right hand man, Father Joseph, who ran an international spy network. I suggest Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence*.

☒ **Man Eaters of Kumaon** by Jim Corbett

This is best read at night with the lights turned down.

Back in the Stone Age when I was a teenager, I was given this book by a Pakistani doctor, and I was thoroughly entranced (and grateful). Many decades later, I just finished rereading it and it is still a good book to read.

This book takes place at the time of the British Raj and before every animal is on the verge of extinction, as is the case now. It is about tigers in northern British India that turned maneaters because they sustained an injury which prevented them from pursuing their natural prey and turned to eating humans to avoid starvation. Corbett was a hunter that went after these man eaters and the book is a series of "war stories" which keep the reader tense during the narration. Kumaon, incidentally, is a region in northern India, between Nepal and China.

This would be a good book to give a son or daughter after age 7. Or for yourself.

Until We All Come Home: A Harrowing Journey, a Mother's Courage, a Race to Freedom

by Kim de Blecourt

A true story about a couple who went overseas to adopt a child, in this case, the country being Ukraine prior to the Russian invasion. Although they expected it to be a straightforward affair, they were soon sucked into a bureaucratic morass. Initially, the Ukrainians attempted to con them into adopting defective children, but they circumvented their crude attempts. When they settled on a child, bureaucratic obstacles kept cropping up. Then, when it came for the adoption hearing, things really began to unravel as a particular bureaucrat embraced as his special mission in life to prevent these people from adopting the boy (there was

a probably Russian inspired propaganda rumor that Americans were adopting children for organ harvesting). The father had to return back to America to resume work and the wife was left behind in a country that was alien to her. The bureaucrat threw at her one bureaucratic obstacle after another, but eventually she prevailed. Throughout, her Christian faith helped to sustain her and influenced some of the Ukrainians who initially had a cynical outlook. Although at first depressing, it slowly began to be uplifting.

The Six Wives of Henry VIII by Alison Weir

I am so glad I read this book. It overthrew my previously prejudiced view of Henry VIII. Up to then, I held the conventional view that Henry was nothing but a lecher, checking off one wife after another and that his wives were poor, innocent, victims of his lechery. Part of this official reputation I got from watching the film *Anne of the Thousand Days*.

What Weir has done is put the focus on the women and it turns out that the story was much more complex and multifaceted and that several of the women were far from poor innocent victims. In fact, Anne Boleyn was a malignant bitch and not only that, *but she was the one that manipulated Henry* and not the other way around. Additionally, his persecution of the Catholic Church originated with some of the women since it was they who championed either the Catholic faith or the Protestant faith.

El Tema de Nuestro Tiempo/The Modern Theme

José Ortega y Gasset was the foremost Spanish philosopher of the first half of the 20th century, which does not mean anything in the English speaking world, since only philosophers from Greece, Germany and France are ever studied.

El Tema de Nuestro Tiempo is a collection of lectures and articles by the Spanish philosopher and contemporary of Unamuno. He analyzed the times in that he lived in, noting that there are periods when intellectual thought sees itself as the acme of civilization and other periods when intellectual thought is radically belligerent and wants to erase everything from the past. He stated that Spaniards, and actually all Europeans, were living in the latter period, that their a psychological, historical, and religious foundation had crumbled. Apropos he states that, "In our times, when someone steps on his foot, a citizen becomes enraged, not with the other person's foot that stepped on him, but on the whole architecture of the universe where it is possible to step on another person's foot."

Brainwashing: Its History; Use by Totalitarian Communist Regimes; and Stories of American and British Soldiers and Captives Who Defied It by Edward Hunter

Although it has now been practically forgotten, one of the shocking aspects of the Korean War was the phenomenon of "brainwashing," something that had never been encountered in previous wars. British and American POWs began broadcasting propaganda in favor of the Communists. When the POWs came back, many exhibited odd psychological behaviors, atypical of POWs from previous wars. It took them a while to get back to normal. It was baffling.

The book/film *The Manchurian Candidate* was absurdly based on brainwashing phenomenon.

The way this was conducted was simplicity itself. Unlike previous scenarios, POWs had to go to classrooms to be "re-educated" (a familiar term now, but unknown then). Natural leaders were automatically segregated from the rest of the soldiers. They were asked to write their biographies and their

(scant) knowledge of history was exploited to insert false history. On top of that, they were manipulated into reporting what today we would refer to as “microaggressions.”

The book is based on numerous interviews with POWs. Patterns became clear in hindsight. Interestingly, the Communists were never able to convert black Americans, even though they had legitimate grievances about situation in their country. Those POWs that resisted the brainwashing developed tactics that were effective and some even turned the tables around in that some of the indoctrinators doubted their sanity. The shortcoming of the book is that it focuses on the positive cases rather than on the negative ones.

This book, and others like it, should be mandatory in the military academy.

Incidentally, the British spy who did so much damage to British intelligence, George Blake, was turned while he was a POW in Korea.

Oh, one more thing: the Critical Race Studies that have become mandatory indoctrination sessions in many institutions are eerily familiar to the brainwashing techniques.

That is not a coincidence.

Armando Simón is a retired psychologist with a degree in history and is the author of stage plays and short stories, such as *The [Book](#) of Many Books* and *A Prison [Mosaic](#)*.