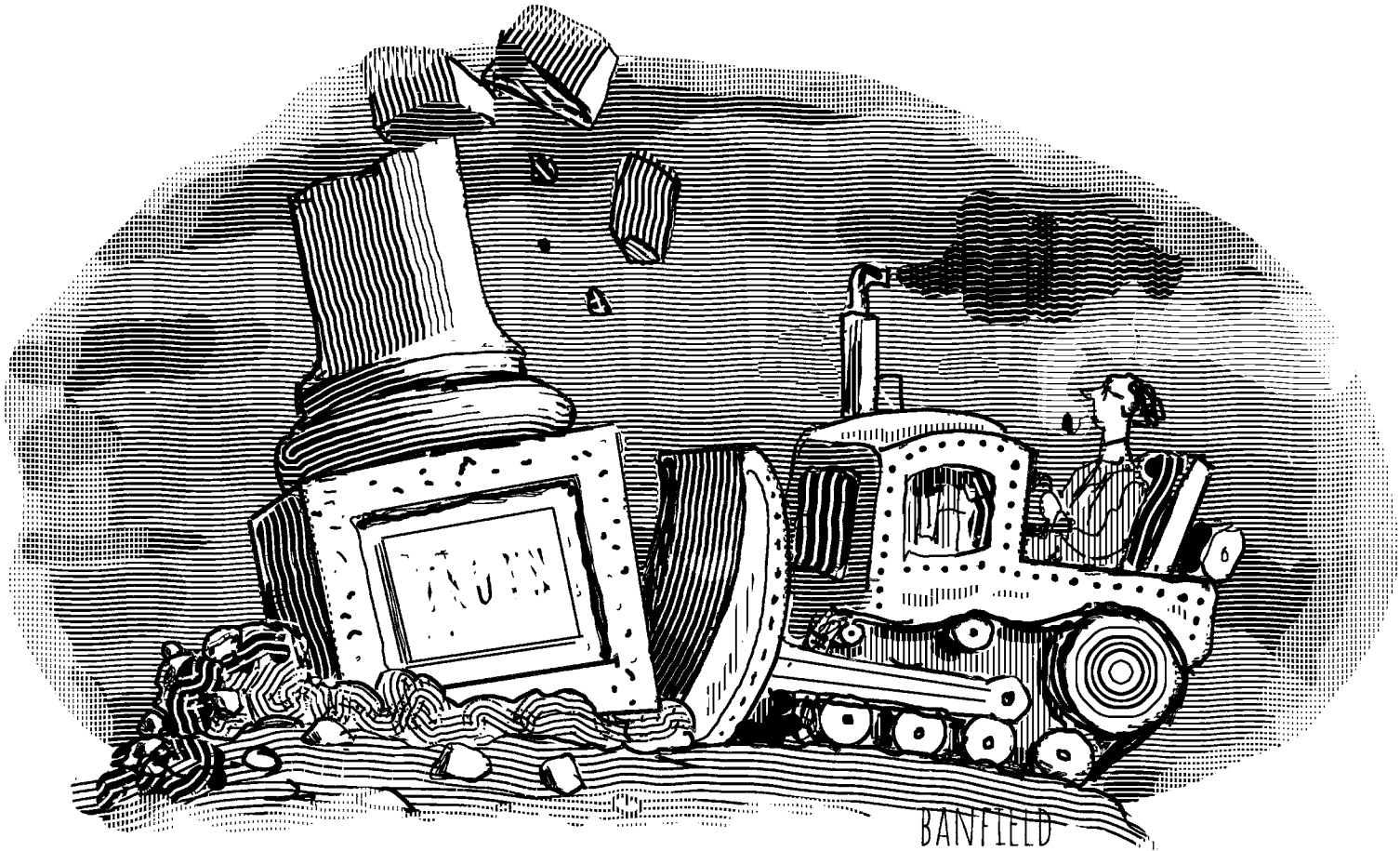


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REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship



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WE SHALL NOT FIGHT ON THE BEACHES

The Camp of the Saints, by Jean Raspail, translated by Ethan Rundell.
Vauban Books, 380 pages, \$38.95 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper)



ACTUALITÉS

DYSTOPIAN NOVELS ARE NOT PREDICTIONS but projections: they imagine what the world will become if a current trend continues uninterrupted. The difference between prediction and projection is vital but often overlooked. The former is a call to fatalism, the latter a call to action.

In a sense, dystopian novels are both optimistic and conservative. They are optimistic in that they do not hold the future they describe to be inevitable and unavoidable. They are conservative in that they imagine a world very much worse than our own, and therefore are an encouragement to political virtues such as prudence and realism. They remind us that, short of extermination camps or other complete disasters, we always have something to

lose as well as to gain and that progress often has a dark—even a very dark—side. Perfection is not of this world.

In 1973, Jean Raspail, who died aged 94 in 2020, published his dystopian novel *The Camp of the Saints*, for which he is now mostly remembered (certainly outside of France, though he was the author of many other well-considered novels and travelogues, and narrowly missed election to the *Académie française*). *The Camp of the Saints* is a book that refuses to lie down, so to speak, despite attempts to render it invisible or make it go away.

The plot is simple. A huge armada of rotting hulks, bearing a million impoverished and half-starved Bengalis desperate to reach

Europe, which they suppose to be a land flowing with milk and honey, sets out from Calcutta and eventually reaches the south coast of France. The local population flees before this invasion, no official efforts having been made to repel it. French society collapses; the success of the armada spells the downfall of Europe, and the whole of the West, as a civilization.

THIS IS A NEW AND EXCELLENT TRANSLATION by Ethan Rundell of the 2011 edition of Raspail's novel, published by Vauban Books (whose name is a reference to the great 17th-century defensive military engineer and architect, the Marquis de Vauban). It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that



the re-translation and re-publication of the book is conceived by both its publisher and translator as an act of civilizational defense against the dangers of which Raspail warned.

In the book's preface, Nathan Pinkoski compares it to both Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but I don't think it can be put in their class. It is very badly written, too long, verbose, and frequently boring. There is always a danger that a *roman à thèse* will become more *thèse* than *roman*, and this is precisely what happened with Raspail's book. Quite often, one feels on reading it as if one had been cornered at a cocktail party by a fanatic determined to get his point across who will not let you go until he has succeeded in doing so. One is buttonholed, cajoled, harangued by the narrator (who never makes his role quite clear), or by the characters, who stand for ideas rather than emerge as real human beings. *The Camp of the Saints* is a fictionalized essay, whose ideas could have been expressed in 20 or 30 pages.

FROM THE FIRST, THE BOOK WAS ATTACKED as racist and even white supremacist. Its author spent a lot of his life describing and sympathizing deeply with remote non-white populations, so the charge against him personally cannot stick. But it is not difficult to understand why his book should have been attacked in this fashion. The desperate emigrants are dirty, foul-smelling, superstitious, concupiscent, fatalistic, heathen, unthinking, and without apparent scruple. They are not individuals, they are a mass, a vast herd, like wildebeest during their transhumance in the Serengeti. They are more biological phenomena than human beings. If I were Bengali, I would not much care to have had my compatriots depicted in this way.

But Raspail is an equal-opportunity deprecator, and his true target is the French intelligentsia and, by extension, that of the whole Western world, which he depicts as cowardly, sentimental, opportunistic, dishonest, shallow, vain, and self-satisfied. Although the intellectual class is supposed to live by ideas, it has its herd instincts, and it is of some historic interest to read how far Raspail thought political correctness and wokeness (which, of course, he did not name as such) had ravaged intellectual life as early as 1973.

He depicts the intelligentsia—which includes the political class—as riven by guilt and cultural self-loathing, accepting uncritically the idea that the First World is rich because the Third World is poor, and vice versa.

The First World does not deserve to survive, therefore; it has no moral standpoint from which to resist the invasion of people from the Third World, whose desperate situation is a consequence of the West's past violence and present rapacity. Being overrun by interlopers is thus a form of morally justified and necessary restitution. The wickedness of the West is projected backward, so that attachment to its traditions and way of life becomes sinful and inadmissible. The Catholic Church, as much as the Protestant, has in effect ceased to be religious. The fictional pope has sold all the Vatican's treasures and given the proceeds to the poor, though the proceeds are not enough to cover the needs of rural Pakistan for a year. The pope has not only lost any sense that his role is spiritual rather than secular but has even lost all attachment to the culture of which he is the inheritor. A semi-Marxist or *marxisant* conception of social justice as life's *summum bonum*, to the exclusion of all other desiderata, has taken over and destroyed minds as a neurotropic virus takes over and destroys brains.

ACCORDING TO RASPAIL (AND I THINK we may safely deduce the author's attitude from the book—indeed he says as much in an essay published as an introduction to it), the French population has been softened up, anaesthetized, made passive, indifferent to, and unable to resist any danger by a long process of propaganda by intellectuals. Two commentators on the most popular radio stations in the book, one called Durfort and the other Vilsberg, pour a kind of paralyzing poison into the ears of their listeners.

Durfort is a serial fighter for good, or supposedly good, causes: when he drops one cause, it is only to raise another to keep his level of moral indignation up, as well as that of his listeners. He sees the armada heading for France from Bengal as a good cause inasmuch as the French are responsible for the poverty and destitution that impelled the million people on board to flee, poverty and destitution being an egregious injustice:

As for the miscarriage of justice, forgive me for saying that we are all responsible for it. The wealthy nations have condemned the Third World. They have erected all kinds of barriers—moral, economic, political—and behind them imprisoned three quarters of the world's population. Not for life, but for many successive lives...no one will shake me of the conviction that there is, if you will, an exploiter and an exploited.

The kind of guilt which this calls forth is largely bogus and exhibitionistic. It is for public consumption and personal aggrandizement rather than for a genuinely wished-for change in the speaker's life. It also signifies the speaker's arrogant but unjustified confidence that his society is so strong that he can continue to enjoy its benefits while also undermining its self-confidence—or making pretense of undermining it. Durfort is paid very well for his efforts at subversion, in whose real effects or consequences he has no interest. Personal advancement and gratification, not social improvement, is his aim.

THE OTHER POURER OF POISON INTO ears is Vilsberg, a relativist who "carried his doubt about like a cross of redemption":

Day after day, month after month, doubt after doubt [in his broadcasts], order became a kind of fascism; education, a constraint; work, a form of alienation; revolution, mere sport; leisure, a class privilege; marijuana, just another kind of tobacco; the family, an impediment; consumption, a kind of oppression; success, a shameful disease; sex, a harmless leisure activity; youth, a permanent tribunal; maturity, the new senility; discipline, an affront to the human personality; the Christian religion...and the West...and white skin...Boris Vilsberg probed, Boris Vilsberg doubted.

Oddly enough, this kind of relativism has proved perfectly compatible with the most absolute and rigid of moral judgments: that all that was Western was rotten, degenerate, and evil, and therefore the collapse of Western society represents progress. As the autochthonous population of the south of France flees north before the arrival of the invading hordes, the reality of the situation suddenly dawning on them, large numbers of intellectuals rush south to greet the invaders as liberators from their illicitly prosperous lives. As for the army, initially sent south to prevent the disembarkation of the immigrants, its morale has been as thoroughly rotted by Durfort and Vilsberg as that of the civilians. The disparity of power between the French state and the million starving emigrants is an illusion. In fact, it is the latter who are in the stronger position, for no one dares obstruct them. Nietzsche might have predicted precisely this. Our relativism is both absolute and universalist. Absolute relativist universalism is not a strong position from which to defend a way of life, or indeed anything else.



IS RASPAIL'S BOOK VISIONARY? HOW YOU answer depends on how precisely a visionary book should correspond to the reality that emerges after its publication. Mass immigration has undoubtedly transformed the appearance, culture, and politics of several European countries. Fewer than 40% of Londoners are now white British; in 1961, it was nearly 98%. At least a quarter of the population of Brussels is Muslim. More than 40% of elementary and middle school children in Vienna are Muslim. Sweden, which not long ago was as crime-free as it is possible for any modern country to be, is now the most crime-ridden country in Europe, thanks almost entirely to immigration. On the Métro toward the station nearest my Parisian *piéd-à-terre*, I am often in a racial minority, sometimes a small one, though it is not possible to say what race, if any, is in the majority or even has a plurality. French is only one language spoken among others. None of this would have surprised Raspail. Far from foreseeing difficulties caused by mass immigration, governments either did nothing to discourage, or actively encouraged, it. In France, the supposedly conservative government of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing permitted family reunification, thus turning guest workers into permanent residents, promoting ghettoization, and giving a powerful instrument into the hands of the kind of people who believed that France had a duty to welcome any number of immigrants from the Third World. I know educated young people in France who believe that there can be no illegal immigrants, because there are no illegal immigrants to the earth and all humanity is one. This is precisely the sentimental (and self-satisfied) humanitarianism that

Raspail deplored and satirized in *The Camp of the Saints*, and which he knew would exert so deeply corrosive an effect that it would eventually threaten the viability of whole countries.

Raspail makes no effort to explain the increasing prevalence of this sentimental subversion in the mind of the Western European, whether it arose in response to catastrophes of the recent past, or is a reaction against loss of European power and pre-eminence that required a kind of gestalt switch in order to preserve a sense of significance. In the time of that pre-eminence, Western Europe prided itself on being the source of all progress throughout the world. Today, at least, it could pride itself on being the source of all evil. In this way it preserves a sense of its own importance, even if doing so entails dehumanizing others as if they were incapable of wrongdoing of their own.

But there were some things that he did not foresee—or if he foresaw them, omitted to mention. Chief among these was his failure to foresee or mention the peculiar difficulties for Western countries posed by large-scale Muslim immigration. In making Hindu Bengalis the Trojan horse, he was startlingly, almost diametrically, mistaken. Hindu immigrants have never created difficulties anywhere; and, oddly enough, it is Eastern, Muslim Bengalis, not Western, Hindu Bengalis, who have established a vast ghetto in London's East End, and have profoundly corrupted the local politics. A member of the British Parliament, who was elected in a constituency in which Muslims were a majority, on a platform that made Gaza the most important issue, recently made a speech in which he called on Muslims to re-

main united in the face of the enemy—the very West to which they had emigrated.

IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT JUST IMMIGRANTS. What they bring with them is as important as what they are offered by the host country. If what they bring with them is an evangelizing religion that claims, however fatuously, to be the answer to all of mankind's little problems, a religion moreover that has a very strong hold over them and that is maintained by a effective system of social ostracism in the event of dissent, they will obviously have more difficulty integrating than if they have no such religion.

Raspail's flawed novel is an illustration of an elementary political principle. For a liberal democracy to work, there must be a *demos*; for there to be a *demos*, there must be something more in common among them than living geographically cheek-by-jowl (without at the same time demanding an absolute uniformity). To import huge numbers of people who do not share, and indeed are resistant to sharing, the minimum that holds a *demos* together is inimical to liberal democracy.

In this most important sense Jean Raspail was visionary, even if he did not correctly identify the source of the greatest threat. Perhaps the most revealing thing in the book is his account, in the essay that precedes the novel, of how prominent political figures either ignored or repudiated *The Camp of the Saints* in public, but agreed with it in private. It proved to be a disastrous disjunction.

Theodore Dalrymple is a physician and psychiatrist, a contributing editor to City Journal, and the author, most recently, of Nothing But Wick- edness: The Delusions of Our Culture (Gibson Square Books).

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