

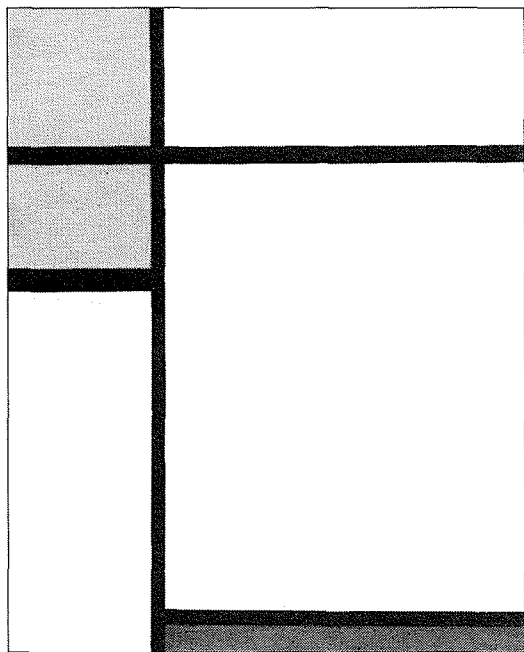
he rarely exhibited them and wouldn't discuss them except to say they 'weren't any good' and had 'no permanent value.'"

Mondrian's realistic flowers ran counter to his own artistic doctrine of "neoplasticism," which he once defined as "the absolute devaluation of tradition . . . the exposure of the whole swindle of lyricism and sentiment . . . the need for abstraction and simplification." The artist, he often said, had to turn away from the delights of the natural world.

In his life, as in his art, Mondrian, a life-long bachelor from a strict Calvinist family, was continually stripping away the extraneous. He appeared to be the most

devout of abstractionists. Yet among the few things he kept always with him was a group of his flower pictures. "This fact alone speaks louder than all his own renunciations of his secret garden," Kenner says.

Mondrian believed that art could be a means to achieving "paradise on earth." His delicate flowers, Kenner writes, "form a sort of spiritual autobiography, a record of [his] oblations to the new art and the new life he believed it would usher in. If he recognized the integrity and power of these works, he suppressed them out of a fierce dedication to the ideals of 'neoplasticism.'"



Abstractionist Piet Mondrian, famous for such works as the 1933 Composition (left), kept Chrysanthemum (right) and his other realistic studies of flowers hidden from public view.

Literary Financiers

"The Literary Financier" by Harold James, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1991), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

The financier was one of the large figures of the 19th-century novel. In his savage satire, *The Way We Live Now* (1874-75), for example, Anthony Trollope tells of the sudden rise of financial speculator Augustus

Melmotte, a "hollow vulgar fraud" whom a corrupt society chooses to venerate, and of his fall after being unmasked at the height of his success. Today, observes Princeton historian James, a modern Trol-

lope could draw upon the lives of an Ivan Boesky or a Michael Milken for inspiration—yet no serious “financier novels” have appeared. (The protagonist of Tom Wolfe’s 1987 novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, was a New York banker, but financial themes remained on the novel’s periphery.) Why is it, James asks, that “in an age wracked and obsessed by insider dealing, corrupt ‘arbs’ and manipulation of commodity markets, we do not revive the fine tradition of immortalizing commercial impropriety in the imagination”?

Part of the answer, he says, is that “more and more technical sophistication” has been required of the writer just to be able to describe what is happening. In Theodore Dreiser’s *The Financier* (1912), which told of the ruthless Frank Cowperwood’s rise to power before his fall in the financial panic of 1871, the reader really did learn how the Philadelphia stock exchange worked. By the time of the boom and crash of the late 1920s, however, the “technicalities of stock manipulation had become much too complicated to be easily and at the same time convincingly de-

picted,” James says. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), bond traders frequently appear—but “we never understand what they do or how they do it.”

The main reason for the decline of the financier novel, however, lies elsewhere. “The classic format was concerned with change and with the decline of an old standard of behavior,” James says. “The financier becomes a scourge to punish the greed and immorality of an old elite that can no longer remain true to the idea of its mission.”

In Trollope’s novel, for instance, a character representing the established elite’s traditional honesty and integrity says that the swindler Melmotte is “too insignificant for you and me to talk of, were it not that his position is a sign of the degeneracy of the age. What are we coming to when such as he is an honoured guest at our tables?”

“Once the old society with the high claims of the old order no longer existed,” James says, “the formula for the finance novel disappeared.” No longer was it possible to make “a morality tale out of the life and destiny of the man of business.”

OTHER NATIONS

Who’s Sorry Now?

“Manila’s Malaise” by Carl H. Landé, in *Journal of Democracy* (Winter 1991), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 200, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Philippine President Corazon Aquino’s government has survived seven coup attempts, the most serious in December 1989, the most recent last October. After the “people power” revolution that ousted dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos from power in February 1986, the outlook for the consolidation of Philippine democracy seemed bright. Now, however, says University of Kansas political scientist Landé, there is “gnawing pessimism and disenchantment.” The anti-democratic forces and those who assist them are primarily to blame, of course, although Aquino, her government, and the Philippine Congress are also at fault. But in a larger sense,

Landé says, “the prospects for democracy are dim because of the structure and values of Philippine society, especially its most privileged and powerful classes.”

Filipinos place a high value on forgiveness and reconciliation, especially when it comes to offenses against the state. After Marcos’s downfall, politicians associated with his regime were soon back in the country’s political mainstream. Marcos followers elected to Congress in 1987 were welcomed into the new pro-administration Philippine Democratic Party. “Forgiveness in private affairs is a virtue, and public forgiveness of those who have committed offenses against the state may be good policy