

---

while I sat staring in disbelief at the remains of many of my study subjects."

## ***The Costly War Against Death***

"'The High Cost of Dying' Revisited" by Anne A. Scitovsky, in *The Milbank Quarterly* (No. 4, 1994), Blackwell Publishers, 238 Main St., Cambridge, Mass. 02142.

Health-care specialists have been worrying for years about the high cost of medical care given to dying patients. A 1984 study revealed that the six percent of Medicare enrollees who died in 1978 accounted for 28 percent of all Medicare expenditures. A powerful force behind the nation's soaring expenditures on health care (\$752 billion in 1991), concluded many analysts, was the expensive high-tech care being lavished on the critically ill in their final months. It's not so simple, warns Scitovsky, an emeritus senior staff scientist at the Research Institute of the Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

The costs of medical care in the last year of life are indeed great, she notes. Medicare payments in 1988 were about seven times higher for those who died than for those who survived: \$13,316 per per-

son-year compared with \$1,924. However, only about five percent of the deceased appear (from the fact that their Medicare payments amounted to \$40,000 or more) to have received aggressive, high-tech medical services, such as being put on a respirator or placed in intensive care.

Elderly patients who are given such care, it is important to note, do not all die soon after. Of those who had Medicare payments of \$40,000 or more in 1988, 73,000 died that year—but 70,000 survived. "It is easy enough in retrospect to regard those who died as terminal or dying patients," Scitovsky writes. "It is a different matter, however, to do so prospectively. Despite the enormous advances in medical technology (or possibly because of them), medical prognosis in most serious illnesses is still highly uncertain."

In the long run, Scitovsky believes, bringing health-care spending under control as the population ages is going to demand something even more difficult ethically than cutting back on high-tech care for the *critically* ill elderly in their final months. It will require deciding when to stop giving sustenance and ordinary care, such as antibiotics to fight infection, to *chronically* ill elderly patients in nursing homes. That, she says, will demand "a change in our expectations of what medical care can do for us, especially our attitude toward death."

---

## **ARTS & LETTERS**

---

## ***Broadway's Final Curtain***

"Who Killed Broadway?" by Brooke Allen, in *City Journal* (Winter 1995), Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Despite competition from movies, home video, and cable TV, there is still an audience for live theater. But many theatergoers now go to Broadway only once or twice a year. They are put off by the outrageous ticket prices: at least \$55 to \$65 for a lavish production such as *Les Misérables*, and nearly \$50 even for *Politically Incorrect*, in which a lone comedian,

wearing an ordinary suit, performs in front of the barest of sets. Yet absurdly high as ticket prices have risen, observes Allen, who has written for stage and TV, the costs of production keep going up faster. The result, she argues, is the apparent end of Broadway as a place for original dramas, or even original comedies and musicals.

Just to stage a modest one-set, two-actor play—"the kind of show that, 30 or so years ago, used to open by the dozen every Broadway season"—now takes an initial investment of some \$800,000, Allen says. "Weekly running costs amount to at least \$135,000, which

---

covers salaries for actors, stagehands, designers, and stage managers, rental [of] sound and light equipment, theater rental and fees, managers' salaries, advertising costs, and many other smaller items. No wonder Broadway tickets are never cheap."

But why are the production costs so high? The unions, those of stagehands and of musicians in particular, get a lot of the blame. The stagehands' union requires each of the 36 Broadway theaters to have a permanent "house" carpenter, electrician, and property manager. They help set up scenery and conduct rehearsals, and then, when the show is running, appear only on payday—to collect a weekly salary of \$800–\$900. The musicians' union, meanwhile, insists that from nine to 22 musicians be assigned to each theater used for musicals, and that they all be employed even if the show needs only four. [The union in 1993 agreed to relax this rule in "special situations." The producers of *Smokey Joe's Café*, a musical which opened in March, have been allowed to pay only the seven musicians who actually play.]

Broadway producers typically must also pay theater owners five to six percent of the weekly gross, plus about \$40,000 a week for ushers, concession workers, janitors, and box office staff, plus a separate flat fee of as much as \$20,000 a week. "These sums have gone up enormously in recent decades," Allen says, "largely because ballooning real estate values have driven owners' taxes up."

All of this has consequences on stage. Producers now try to cut costs by reducing the cast, simplifying the scenery, or cutting a three-act play to two acts. "Their other way of staying afloat," Allen writes, "is to minimize risk: hence the push for reliable blockbusters and revivals."

Last season, at Christmas, only one Broadway production was not a musical: *An Inspector Calls*, a revival of a 1924 English play. And of the 17 musicals playing, seven were revivals, one was a reworking of old material, and seven had come to Broadway only after successful runs in London. "The economic problem has become an aesthetic one as well," says playwright Arthur Miller. "My early play, *The*

*Crucible*, would never be produced on Broadway today—too expensive." The ultimate comment may be that Broadway productions of Shakespeare are now all but impossible.

"With any luck," Allen writes, "noncommercial theatrical ventures as well as the popular, mainstream pieces that no longer thrive on Broadway will continue to find a home—albeit a smaller and less glamorous one—off-Broadway." But off-Broadway can never be the major cultural force that Broadway was in its heyday 40 years ago. That Broadway, she laments, is now gone, apparently forever.

## *The Revenge of the Eminent Victorians*

"Eminent Victorianism: What Lytton Strachey Hath Wrought" by Richard D. Altick, in *The American Scholar* (Winter 1995), Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

With *Eminent Victorians* (1918), biographer and critic Lytton Strachey did what no one else, before or since, has done, writes Altick, an emeritus professor of English at Ohio State University. With a single 350-page book, Strachey "turned an entire past society into a laughingstock in the estimation of a new one." Not quite eight decades later, however, it appears that the last laugh is on Strachey.

*Eminent Victorians* cruelly profiled four Victorian worthies: Roman Catholic Cardinal Henry Manning; Florence Nightingale, an idolized humanitarian; Thomas Arnold of Rugby, an education reformer, and General Charles "Chinese" Gordon, a national hero for his exploits in China and his ill-fated defense of Khartoum. In the developing climate of cynicism after World War I, Strachey treated his subjects with indiscriminate ridicule, Altick notes. He portrayed Manning as an obsessive ecclesiastical opportunist, the redoubtable Nightingale as a workaholic driven by ruthless devotion to duty, Arnold as a zealous, pompous public-school headmaster who tended to confuse himself with God, and Gordon as a religious fanatic and dipsomaniac, alternating between Bible and brandy bottle."