the trip, however, she loses the slippers. "The mysterious power of silver has disappeared before it was ever broadly tested," writes Ritter. Just as the hidden meaning of Baum's tale was lost by the time Hollywood put it on the big screen in 1939.

Updike's Christian Slant

"While one can be a Christian and a writer, the phrase 'Christian writer' feels somewhat reductive, and most writers so called have resisted it," notes novelist John Updike, in accepting the Campion Award to a "distinguished Christian person of letters" from the Jesuit magazine *America* (Oct. 4, 1997).

> *Is not Christian fiction, insofar as it exists, a description of the bewilderment and panic, the sense of hollowness and futility, which afflicts those whose search for God is not successful? And are we not all, within the churches and temples or not, more searcher than finder in this regard?*
>
> *I ask, while gratefully accepting this award, to be absolved from any duty to provide orthodox morals and consolations in my fiction. Fiction holds the mirror up to this world and cannot show more than this world contains. But I do admit that there are different angles at which to hold the mirror, and that the reading I did in my twenties and thirties, to prop up my faith, also gave me ideas and a slant that shaped my stories and, especially, my novels.*
>
> *The first,* The Poorhouse Fair, *carries an epigraph from the Gospel of St. Luke; the next,* Rabbit, Run, *from Pascal; the third,* The Centaur, *from Karl Barth; and the fifth,* Couples, *from Paul Tillich. I thought of my novels as illustrations for texts from Kierkegaard and Barth; the hero of* Rabbit, Run *was meant to be a representative Kierkegaardian man, as his name, Angstrom, hints. Man in a state of fear and trembling, separated from God, haunted by dread, twisted by the conflicting demands of his animal biology and his human intelligence, of the social contract and the inner imperatives, condemned as if by otherworldly origins to perpetual restlessness—such was, and to some extent remains, my conception.*

Is Photography an Art?

"From *The World Is Beautiful* to *The Family of Man*: The Plight of Photography as a Modern Art"
by Roger Seamon, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Summer 1997),
American Society for Aesthetics, Haggerty Museum of Art, 404 Cudahy Hall,
Marquette Univ., Milwaukee, Wis. 53201–1881.

Since its beginnings more than a century ago, photography has remained something of a stepchild to the art world. The poet Charles Baudelaire bitterly attacked its earliest aspirations to high-art status in 1859, calling it an intrusion of "industry" into art that had "greatly contributed to the impoverishment of French artistic genius."

There have been a number of very different attempts to explain the low status of photography, notes Seamon, a professor of English at the University of British Columbia. In the 1960s, French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu asserted that photography was considered a middlebrow form because it depicted, or appealed to, ordinary people, whereas "high" modern art "systematically refuses . . . the passions, emotions and feelings which ordinary people put into their ordinary existence." Recently, Kendall Walton and Roger Scruton, professors of philosophy at the University of Michigan and England's Birkbeck College, respectively, have stirred fresh debate. They claim that photography is entirely devoid of an aesthetic dimension. The photograph is not an interpretation of reality but merely a representation of it, they say.

Seamon believes that none of these arguments get to the heart of the matter. Although it was a product of modern technology, he argues, photography was a creature of classical values in art. But, with the rise of modernism in the 20th century, aesthetic standards changed. Photography, however, continued to express the “official” values of Western culture. “The beauty and moral dignity (the two are really one) of the ordinary is at the heart of what we might call democratic classicism, but to top-level intellectuals . . . that ethos is aesthetically heretical,” Seamon observes. Yet these were the values on display in the work of the great 20th-century photographers, such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Henri Cartier-Bresson—values epitomized in the famous 1955 exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, *The Family of Man*.

Since the 1970s, Seamon notes, photography has enjoyed wider critical acceptance, as some avant-garde photographers have abandoned “pure” photography for what he calls the romantic aesthetic. Their work, Seamon argues, “emphasizes the eccentric, ironic, allegedly ‘individual’ response, whereas photography is an expression of communal ideals.” The question, Seamon suggests, is whether by embracing the romantic aesthetic, photography is losing many of its unique and most important characteristics.

OTHER NATIONS

The Liberal Solzhenitsyn

“Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism” by David G. Rowley, in *Journal of Contemporary History* (July 1997), SAGE Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91359.

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, after his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1974, thundered against the West’s materialism and waxed nostalgic for traditional Russian values, disappointed Western liberals swiftly dismissed him as a “Russian nationalist.” Yet when he returned to his homeland in 1994, he was enthusiastically welcomed by Russian liberals—and denounced and vilified by right-wing “nationalists.”

“What went unremarked in the [Western] debate over how liberal or authoritarian Solzhenitsyn was,” writes Rowley, a historian at the University of North Dakota, “was the fact that he stood for something unprecedented in Russian history. He has consistently advocated a Russia by, of and for Russians; he wants the Russian nation to be congruent with the Russian state. It is pre-eminently upon this point that Solzhenitsyn differs from the Russian chauvinist right wing.”

Nationalist leaders such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Gennady Zyuganov are the ones who are mislabeled, Rowley says. They are not nationalists, but imperialists who want to rebuild the old Soviet empire. Solzhenitsyn, by contrast, “is a staunch anti-imperialist.” In his 1990 brochure, *Rebuilding Russia*, he urged that Russia give up its empire, though he hoped that Belarus and Ukraine, as well as certain traditionally Russian territories within other Soviet republics, would remain part of Russia. A critic of *perestroika* (he favored far more gradual change), Solzhenitsyn is now critical of the Russian Federation, which he calls “a false Leninist invention. Russia was never a federation.”

“Solzhenitsyn’s support of democracy continues to be extremely limited and grudging,” Rowley claims, amounting to “little more than support for a strong presidency and local autonomy.” It is not so much his political principles that distinguish him from the right-wing chauvinists, according to Rowley, as his conception of the Russian state.

Solzhenitsyn “provides an alternative to the messianic concept of Russian imperialism that has underlain the traditional conceptions of Russian national identity,” Rowley concludes. “A consistent and implacable foe of imperialism, Solzhenitsyn is a nationalist of a very modern and Western type.” Indeed, Rowley says, his defense of modern nationalism may turn out to be his greatest contribution to his country. “If Yeltsin is Russia’s Cavour,” he suggests, “Solzhenitsyn is her Mazzini.”