

sitically infecting human minds and altering their behavior, causing them to propagate the pattern. . . . Individual slogans, catch-phrases, melodies, icons, inventions, and fashions are typical memes.”

Jeffreys, however, contends that memeticists are mixing metaphors—ones drawn from virology, such as hosts and parasites, with the basic metaphor drawn from genetics. That metaphor asserts “that memes parallel genes” and form an independent, cultural system of natural selection. Researchers should stick with it, he maintains. “If memetic replication is not based on genetic replication and is truly part of a new selection process,” he says, “it cannot be considered parasitic, nor can humans be called hosts. In certain respects, the spread of beliefs, fashions, technologies, and types of artifacts [does] resemble epidemics, but in those respects so does the spread of life on Earth in the first place, along with the subsequent waves and collapses of spreading speciation and mass extinctions.”

Yet even with the viral metaphors discarded, Jeffreys says, memetics still is not genetics,

nor “even a fully fledged theory of selection because it has proposed no plausible mechanism for sufficiently high-fidelity self-replication” of the memes. This is not a fatal flaw, in his view. It merely puts memetics in roughly the same situation as the “largely speculative” study of the origin of life, though without the plausibility that enterprise derives from “the success of the Darwinian explanations of speciation and the fossil record.”

That offers a clue as to how memeticists should proceed, Jeffreys believes. “Culture most probably evolves,” he says, “but relevant empirical evidence is desperately needed” to determine whether it evolves in memetic fashion, by a separate Darwinian system. Memeticists, he urges, should develop “a plausible model of replication,” and test it against existing “cultural equivalents of species, such as religions and ideologies.” If they can show, for instance, how the incest taboo or adoption, which run counter to people’s “genetic interests,” are culturally transmitted, then memetics “will no longer be ‘cocktail party science.’”

ARTS & LETTERS

The Other Daumier

“‘Strange Seriousness’: Discovering Daumier” by Roger Kimball, in *The New Criterion* (Apr. 2000), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Honoré Daumier’s amusing and clever caricatures of lawyers, doctors, politicians, and other denizens of 19th-century Paris remain well known today. But his haunting paintings of Don Quixote and other subjects have been far less celebrated—at least until the recent hit exhibition of his works at the Phillips Collection, in Washington. Much the same discrepancy in response confronted Daumier (1808–79) during his life, observes Kimball, managing editor of the *New Criterion*. “Time and



The exact subject of Daumier’s painting The Uprising (1852–58) is unknown, but it may have been the Revolution of 1848 in France.

again, he attempted to get his work as a painter taken seriously. The Salon was frosty, the public uninterested.”

Daumier, who had little formal education, excelled at caricature—and “became its slave,” Kimball says. His work for Charles Philipon’s *Le Charivari* and other satirical magazines “paid the bills, though barely.” It also earned him, on one occasion, a six-month prison term. The king was not amused by Daumier’s famous lithograph *Gargantua*, showing a pear-headed Louis-Philippe perched on a commode, taking in the country’s treasure from its starving citizens, while excreting writs, honors, and ribbons for royal ministers and favorites.

“There is plenty to admire in Daumier’s caricatures,” says Kimball. “But his paintings . . . exist in an entirely different spiritual and aesthetic register.” They have, as novelist Henry James commented, a “strange seriousness.” A few have religious

themes, Kimball notes, but “his best paintings—some family scenes, *Third-Class Carriage* (1862–64), *The Uprising* (1852–58), *The Fugitives* (1865–70), and several paintings of Don Quixote—are secular. Nevertheless, they possess rare depths of solitude and melancholy tenderness.”

In 1878, when Daumier was blind and one year from death, several friends organized a large retrospective at a gallery in Paris. By then, his oeuvre included nearly 300 paintings, along with thousands of caricatures. Although Daumier could not attend, the exhibition—“carefully designed,” Kimball says, “to highlight Daumier’s achievements as a serious painter”—was “a great moment” for him. At long last his paintings were being recognized. “The show was a rousing critical success,” writes Kimball. But “the masses whom Daumier had pleased, goaded, and amused for decades stayed away *en masse*.”

Shocking Exhibition

“The Business of Art” by András Szánto, in *The American Prospect* (Feb. 28, 2000),
Five Broad St., Boston, Mass. 02109.

The controversy last fall over the *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art left many besides New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani aghast. More disturbing to some than the elephant-dung Virgin Mary and other dubious works on display were the museum’s cozy financial relations with art patrons and dealers. The collection’s owner, Charles Saatchi, for instance, whose works were likely to fetch higher prices thanks to the prestige-enhancing exhibition, paid \$160,000 of the museum’s costs. Did commerce affect curatorial judgment in Brooklyn? *Of course* it did—as it does at most museums of contemporary art, argues Szánto, associate director of the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University.

“The art world isn’t an unscrupulous racket,” he says. “But only the most naïve could assume that money and influence do not play a role in deciding what kind of art gets to be exhibited in museums.” *Of course* “art-works placed in exhibitions and published in catalogues increase in monetary value”; *of course* “corporate sponsors are allowed to

wine and dine clients in museums”; *of course* “lenders to exhibitions are also asked to write checks.” The sorts of deals made in Brooklyn are pretty much SOP these days, says Szánto. “How could they not be? Over the past several decades, the art world has been hurled at the mercy of market forces.”

Between 1982 and 1998, according to a recent Alliance for the Arts report, funding from all governmental sources for New York arts organizations dropped from 28.9 percent of their income to 11.1 percent, with federal funding alone plummeting by 88 percent, to a negligible 1.2 percent. “Corporate funding, which comes with more and more strings attached,” Szánto says, “is also on the wane,” down to 3.9 percent. “Foundation support has been easier to come by in these flush times, but it is a hit-or-miss affair.” As for gift shop sales and other profit-making enterprises, no museum makes more than 10 percent of revenues that way. All this leaves private donors to take up the slack. Meanwhile, Szánto notes, art prices have skyrocketed. Works by Damien Hirst, whose