

Periodicals

ishment painting by creating smaller canvases for private settings. By the 1950s, artists were beginning to reject what they viewed as “the domestication of avant-garde art.” They began working on a much larger scale—a scale that created new demands for museum real estate. (It also led to the development of New York’s Soho art district, where galleries could acquire big, relatively inexpensive buildings.) Taniguchi’s MoMA is partly a delayed response to that pressure for more space.

Thanks largely to founder Alfred Barr’s vision of modern art, the museum’s basic permanent collection has an unusual aesthetic coherence, revealing the complex interrelationships of, among others, cubists, futurists, German expressionists, surrealists, and abstract expressionists. This coherence gives MoMA “a personality of its own that only a few other great museums

can claim,” the authors write. Yet MoMA’s expansion “allows little, if any, more space” than before to display the collection. Important paintings have disappeared from its walls, and groupings of works that gave a full vision of an artist’s achievement have been broken up.

What is to be done? “Perhaps the museum could install somewhere a study collection, in which the finest works that are invisible in the main part of the museum are simply stacked on the walls in rows for anyone interested to come and gaze at them.” Or, more radically, the authors suggest, “perhaps MoMA should consider leaving the business of promoting new art to commercial galleries, and renounce the virtuous satisfaction of aiding the as yet unrecognized genius or the more guilty pleasure of showing it has the power to influence the future of art.”

Conrad as Prophet

“Conrad’s Latin America” by Mark Falcoff, in *The New Criterion* (Jan. 2005),
900 Broadway, Ste. 602, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Although Latin American literature is full of novels dealing with the region’s chronic political disorder, it was left to a Ukrainian-born Pole to write (in English) “the best political—the most enduring—novel ever written about Latin America.” That book, says Falcoff, a Latin American specialist and former scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was published just over 100 years ago: Joseph Conrad’s *Nos-*

tromo: A Tale of the Seaboard (1904).

The San Tomé silver mine in the fictional country of Costaguana is “in some ways the principal character of the novel.” Both the mine and the country have languished for decades under the rule of a brutal dictator, but now, under civilian rule, Costaguana looks abroad for the money and manpower it needs to rebuild itself. Charles Gould, a high-minded

EXCERPT

Recipes for the Imagination

And surely this is part of the appeal of cookbooks—the exercise of imagination involved. For part of what it is to read a recipe, and the bits of prose before and sometimes afterward, is to conjure up mentally what the cookbook instructs for reality. This is why primary school teachers tell us reading is better for children than, say, watching television. Reading makes every child into a producer. If this is right, cookbooks transform imagination into a high-stakes game: our satisfaction depends on our success.

—Stephanie Frank, a University of Chicago graduate student, in *Topic* (6: Food)

Costaguana-born Englishman, corrals money, partners, and technology from abroad to revitalize the mine and, he hopes, the country. "The entire society can 'work' only because its key figures are not Costaguanan at all, but rather Europeans (assisted, to be sure, by a handful of locals with intimate European connections)," writes Falcoff. As San Tomé once more becomes productive, prosperity and peace return to the region.

Enter General Montero, a "backwoods fighter" who rose to minister of war after backing the winning side at just the right moment in a civil war, and his brother Pedrito. They cynically exploit the rhetoric of race, class, and anti-imperialism to incite a rebellion, with the real goal of gaining control of San Tomé's wealth. Their scheme fails only after a long series of ad-

ventures, and the book ends with the mining town's secession, ratified by the presence of a U.S. warship.

General Montero "foreshadows a whole host of counterfeit social revolutionaries in uniform," writes Falcoff, including Venezuela's current leader, Hugo Chávez. Other characters, such as Father Corbelán, the left-wing cleric with connections on both sides of the law, and Nostromo, the skilled foreign worker and compromised figure from whom the novel takes its name, also have contemporaries in modern Latin America. "With stunning prescience," Conrad saw that "whatever the sins of colonialism, what was bound to follow could conceivably be worse. *Nostromo* is a supreme work of art which is also a prophecy, one which more often than not has been amply fulfilled."

OTHER NATIONS

Africa's Accidental Borders

"The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi" by Daniel N. Posner, in *American Political Science Review* (Nov. 2004), George Washington Univ., Dept. of Political Science, 2201 G St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20052.

In 1891, officials of the British South Africa Company drew a line on a map in order to carve out two new districts in the lands under their control, heedlessly slicing through the traditional boundaries of the Chewa and Tumbuka tribes. It's the kind of story that's been repeated many times in Africa and elsewhere, with arbitrary boundaries tragically setting the stage for future tribal and ethnic conflict. But in this case, there is a difference. On one side of the border, in what is now Malawi, Chewa and Tumbuka today are at war culturally and politically, just as one would predict. In neighboring Zambia, however, the two tribes are allies and "brethren."

Why is this so? It's not that cultural differences are more pronounced in Malawi, according to Posner, a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. In surveys, he found that members of the two tribes on each side of the border point to the same basic divisions: Tumbuka parents, for example, demand a large price of perhaps

seven cows when their daughters marry, while Chewa parents are happy with a single chicken. But in Malawi, people are more likely to attach negatives to their descriptions: Tumbukas call the Chewas "lazy," and Chewas return the favor by calling the Tumbukas conceited.

The explanation for the cross-border difference, Posner argues, is that in Zambia both tribes make up too small a part of the national population (less than seven percent each) to form a distinctive group or, more important, a bloc big enough for political leaders to exploit. In Malawi, however, the Chewa are 28 percent of the total, the Tumbuka 12 percent.

The coming of democracy crystallized the national differences. In 1994, when Malawians finally got a chance to vote, in the country's first election, longtime dictator Hastings Kamuzu Banda played the tribal card with a vengeance, warning his fellow Chewas of Tumbuka threats to their interests and exacerbating ethnic tensions in the