infested bog called Lake Borgne. And from there, they slowly advance to the Villeré Plantation, about eight miles below the city, directly in front of Jackson's line of defense—while Jackson struggles to arm and deploy his troops.

Writing about battle requires high literary skill—there must be clarity, energy, constant vivid physical action. Groom has a wonderful eye for detail. Here is Laffite's odd cutthroat brother Dominique You beside his cannon: "squat, smiling his perpetual grin, his neck thick as a tortoise, and smoking a cigar." Groom understands when to pause for readers to catch their breath, or to build suspense. He makes full use of primary sources, particularly the numerous British diaries that have survived. He has a moving empathy for the soldiers on the eve of combat: "As to the emotions a man feels on confronting an enemy, one whom he will actually *see* at any moment, there is no known expression in the English language; his mind can only work through an abstract collage of uncertain thoughts. This morning the men stood or squatted, honing knives, cleaning weapons, . . . or dreaming restlessly of violence."

The climactic moment arrives on Sunday morning, January 8, 1815. While the church bells are still ringing in New Orleans, some 5,300 seasoned British veterans march forward in columns, ramrod straight, drums beating, against some 4,500 entrenched Americans: militia, volunteers, Choctaws, men of color, Tennessee and Kentucky sharpshooters. When Winston Groom's brilliant account is over, 2,036 British soldiers have been killed or wounded, and three British generals lie dead on the field. Jackson's casualties are an astonishing eight killed, 13 wounded.

It was a battle, historians always note, that need never have been fought—on Christmas Eve, some 5,000 miles away, the British and American commissioners had already signed the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812. But no one in North America would know that for another six weeks. Meanwhile, the Battle of New Orleans had already begun to take its place, in Groom's words, as "a defining event of the American 19th century." It put an end forever to British territorial designs in the United States. It solidified, for a time, the faltering Union. And it launched Andrew Jackson and his un-Jeffersonian brand of populist democracy straight toward the White House, which would soon enough be rebuilt from its ashes and receive him as the seventh president.

■ Max Byrd, a professor emeritus of English at the University of California, Davis, is the author of the historical novel *Jackson* (1997), as well as *Jefferson* (1993), *Grant* (2000), and *Shooting the Sun* (2004).

Benumbed by Joy

Reviewed by Florence King

ARTIFICIAL HAPPINESS: The Dark Side of the New Happy Class.

By Ronald W. Dworkin. Carroll & Graf. 343 pp. $24.95

There's nothing like an authoritative, well-documented Grand Guignol horror story. If you've ever wondered about the source of those big, ecstatic American smiles or the frantically cheery commands to "have a nice day" that have become an inescapable part of our national life, read this riveting book and wonder no more. Chances are that the perpetrators of the friendly fire are zonked out on antidepressants, floating on magnetic clouds of alternative medicine, or overexercised into a state of euphoria. All three instrumentalities have a common goal of "artificial happiness"—happiness as an end in itself, an induced emotion with no connection to the facts of one's life.

An M.D. who is still a practicing anesthesiologist, Ronald W. Dworkin is also a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute with a Ph.D. in political philosophy—that rarity, the doctor-as-intellectual who's

educated in the humanities and well read in something other than his narrow specialty. He traces the beginnings of artificial happiness to the 1950s. Reacting against the alienating conformity described in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), popular clergy of the day published cheery self-help books. For the comfortable Protestant middle class there was Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which counseled, "Practice happy thinking every day. . . . Develop the happiness habit, and life will become a continual feast." For Catholics there was Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's *Way to Happiness* (1953), and for Southern Protestants there was Billy Graham's *The Secret of Happiness* (1955).

Not surprisingly, the tranquilizer Miltown became popular around this time, followed by Valium and Librium in the 1960s, when the Age of Aquarius hit and Timothy Leary upped the happiness ante in *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1968). In 1994 Elizabeth Wurtzel published *Prozac Nation*, a memoir of her 10-year depression. The book and Prozac both took off. Over the next 10 years, prescriptions for antidepressants tripled, as doctors began treating depression the way the managed care insurance system wanted them to: fast. With 13 minutes allotted for each office visit, a prescription for Prozac, Zoloft, or Paxil kept the assembly line moving.

Meditation, yoga, acupuncture, magnets, herbs, and aromatherapy are all variations on the placebo principle.

Dworkin presents a gallery of legal druggies who are so content with their artificial happiness that they have lost all incentive to take action against what made them unhappy in the first place. A man who stays married to a mentally unstable virago, lest a divorce enable her to clean him out financially and gain custody of their son, tells Dworkin, "My wife is still a bitch. I can't stand her. But now I don't care so much. I still feel good no matter what happens." Dworkin believes that society is the victim when millions choose this stupefied state of least resistance, because it eventually destroys conscience and character on a national scale. As others have noted, we need only imagine Abe Lincoln, a clinical depressive, on Prozac: "Well, the Union is finished, we're two countries now, and slavery is a fact of life, but hey, I feel good about myself."

Except for certain chiropractic techniques, Dworkin takes an equally dim view of alternative medicine. Meditation, yoga, acupuncture, magnets, herbs, and aromatherapy are all variations on the placebo principle. They bring patients to "a state of weakened rational activity, filling the emptiness in their lives with romantic notions and grabbing hold of them with useless substances."

He's at his most mordant on the fitness craze, which got its start in 1975 when a scientist studying runners' euphoric "second wind" discovered naturally occurring stimulants in the human brain that attach themselves to receptors in the same way that morphine attaches to opiate receptors. Scientists first called these stimulants "endorphines," "endo" for endogenous and "orphine" for morphine. An *e* was later dropped and a buzzword was born. Given a medical imprimatur, joggers never miss a chance to announce, "Gotta get those endorphins going."

Mild exercise isn't enough to produce artificial happiness. It has to be obsessive, "a testament of piety and rectitude; going to the gym regularly became medicine's Sunday school version of life." The happiness of fitness freaks is more like convert's zeal. It is also the happiness of schadenfreude, "expressed most commonly in contempt for fat people and an elevation of trim people to sainthood." The culture of exercise "is not about health; it is about pride."

Dworkin admits that he has had scant success in alerting political activists to the dangers of artificial happiness. His remarks were received with polite indifference by a gathering of

religious conservatives fixated on beginning-of-life and end-of-life issues, yet, as he shows, our belief that happiness is the measure of life has a direct bearing on both abortion and euthanasia. The first-trimester fetus lacks the rudimentary nervous system to experience self-awareness. Without self-awareness there can be no happiness, and thus, in the happiness-is-all worldview, no need for life. By the same token, unhappiness inevitably increases in old age. We are moving, Dworkin predicts, toward accepting physician-assisted suicide as a preemptive strike against the miseries of decrepitude.

The book bogs down only once, when Dworkin, straining to find a cure for our happiness addiction, advises patients to read philosophy and doctors to take courses in the humanities, so that they can relate to each other on a deeper level. This would never work in America, because we know that introspective people tend to be unhappy. But at least Dworkin himself has read widely, and it shows on every page. His best observation is reminiscent of a poem by Wallace Stevens or the baleful imprecations of ancient Greek drama: "And there is something unpleasant about their happiness, something lacking in warmth. There is nothing sunny in the sun; it's more like a hot moon. Their happiness radiates unwholesomeness because it emanates from an unnatural source, not from real life."

■ Florence King is the author of 10 books, including *Confessions of a Failed Southern Lady* (1985), *With Charity Toward None: A Fond Look at Misanthropy* (1992), *The Florence King Reader* (1995), and, most recently, *STET, Damnit!*, a collection of her *National Review* columns from 1991 to 2002.

Final Bow

Reviewed by Albert Innaurato

THE TOUGHEST SHOW ON EARTH: My Rise and Reign at the Metropolitan Opera.

By Joseph Volpe, with Charles Michener. Knopf. 304 pp. $25.95

For 123 years, New York's Metropolitan Opera has been one of the greatest purveyors of the art form in the world. Its stage has been graced by such legendary figures as Enrico Caruso and Rosa Ponselle. In the 1930s, it proved that Richard Wagner's music dramas could sell out the house, and such Wagner specialists as Kirsten Flagstad and Lauritz Melchior virtually took up residence. For many years, well into the 1940s, the Metropolitan produced new and very interesting operas on a vast scale (the old Met on Broadway was immense, as is the new Met, now 40 years old, at Lincoln Center) while also helping to keep familiar works alive. The podium has been home to Gustav Mahler, Arturo Toscanini, and, more recently, James Levine, who has transformed an uneven orchestra into a world-class ensemble. The Met has produced opera seven times a week every season since the early 1950s, often with the most famous singers in the world. Only a few European houses can match that schedule, and they have fewer seats and far more government funding.

Joseph Volpe has been the Met's general manager for 16 years, the first to rise to the top from the working ranks of the house. Now, having announced plans to retire later this year, he has written his memoir.

Those familiar with Volpe's scheming ways will note a queer passage late in the book. He speaks glowingly of a Swedish soprano named Erika Sunnegårdh, even likening her to the legendary Rosa Ponselle, though it appears that he has never heard Sunnegårdh in a complete performance. When writing this, Volpe was aware that the all-but-unknown Sunnegårdh was scheduled to make her Met debut on April 13, 2006. But he couldn't possibly have known that she would substitute for the beloved Karita Mattila in a broadcast performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* on April 1, and would stand in for Mattila on another occasion before the scheduled debut. The broadcast got enormous hype, includ-