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**RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT**


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percent of the world's then tiny rubber output. During World War II, when Japanese forces cut off the West from Southeast Asian rubber, U.S. scientists planted 32,000 acres of the shrub in Texas, Arizona, and California. By 1945, 15 tons of guayule rubber could be processed daily. But after the war, breakthroughs in synthetic rubber production ended the need. The plants were burned off to make way for orange groves.

Guayule latex comes from the shrub's branches and roots. The plants contain up to 20 percent rubber. Guayule needs no irrigation or pesticides. Unlike hevea, the shrub can be mechanically cultivated and harvested.

The National Science Foundation and the U.S. Agriculture and Commerce Departments have launched modest efforts to promote guayule — chiefly by funding both seed collections and breeding research at the University of Arizona and the Los Angeles County Arboretum. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs is pushing it as a cash crop for American Indians. So far, the main problem seems to be yield. Though some guayule fields produced 1,400 pounds of rubber per acre per growth cycle (3–5 years) during World War II, hevea consistently yields more than 2,000 pounds per acre annually.

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**ARTS & LETTERS**


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*The Trial*  
*Behind 'The Trial'*

"Kafka and the Beiliss Affair" by Arnold J. Band, in *Comparative Literature* (Spring 1980), 223 Friendly Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. 97403.

A court inquest in Prague was probably the inspiration for Franz Kafka's classic novel *The Trial* (written in 1914), suggests Band, a professor of comparative literature at UCLA.

The year 1912 marked a turning point for Kafka (1883–1924), then working as a young clerk in a Prague insurance company. In the fall, he wrote the short stories "The Judgement" and "Metamorphosis" and the first chapters of the novel *Amerika*. [Kafka refused to publish his writings during his lifetime.] Moreover, during that year, the attention of Kafka's fellow Eastern European Jews was riveted on the trial of Mendel Beiliss, an obscure Kiev Jew accused of killing a Christian child before Passover and of saving his blood to prepare unleavened bread. Such accusations—and they were not uncommon—led to recurrent anti-Semitic rioting throughout Eastern Europe. Tsar Nicholas II used the Beiliss affair to whip up anti-Jewish feeling in Russia and shore up his regime.

Kafka never mentioned the Beiliss episode in his known literary works or in his diaries. But Max Brod, a friend and biographer who

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preserved Kafka's writings for posterity against the author's wishes, recalled that Kafka's last love, Dora Dymant, burned at the writer's request several manuscripts, including a story on Beiliss. Though Kafka often belittled his Jewish heritage, he lived in the Jewish ghetto, attended synagogue occasionally, and regularly read *Selbtswehr*, a weekly for Bohemian Jews that reported on Beiliss's ordeal and its violent fallout obsessively.

*Selbtswehr's* coverage of the hearing harped on several themes Kafka would later incorporate into *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and other works—the perversion of truth by a truth-seeking process; and the threat to society posed by an official vendetta against an individual. Missing, however, is the gradual acceptance of guilt by Kafka's protagonists.

Kafka both resented and accepted authority. Biographers have traced his "self-corrosive guilt" to a threatening, domineering father. In Beiliss's undeserved plight, Band suggests, Kafka glimpsed a vehicle for expressing his own feelings.

### *Not Nostalgia But Populism*

"Andrew Wyeth: Popular Painting and Populism" by Andrew Brighton, in *Art Monthly* (June 1980), 37 Museum St., London, WC1A 1LP, United Kingdom.

Most viewers look at Andrew Wyeth's widely reproduced painting, *Christina's World* (1948), and see a touching picture of a young woman in contemplation, overcome by longing in a benign rustic setting. But liberal critics dismiss it as just one more example of Wyeth's exaggerated, even reactionary, nostalgia.

Brighton, a lecturer at the Oxford Polytechnic in England, reminds Wyeth's detractors that the real Christina Olsen (Wyeth's neighbor in Maine) was crippled. Wyeth, he argues, has caught her pulling herself up a hill, useless legs dragging behind her. This "harsh vision" reflects one of Wyeth's prime themes—existence after the departure of God—and shows him to be a major 20th-century painter.

Wyeth's best work evinces a Protestant New England brand of populism, argues Brighton: Art is valid only if based on "real" values, not "vacuous pleasures" or aristocratic pretension, a view instilled in Wyeth by his father, a noted illustrator. "Artists are not living hard enough," N. C. Wyeth wrote in 1921. Inspiration, he believed, must come from toil—"lifting . . . sweating . . . squinting into the sun and enjoying it."

After his father died in 1945, Wyeth's work dealt increasingly with death and loss. He retained the painter-illustrator Norman Rockwell technique taught him by his father. Yet he refined it by adding the "infinity of detail" found in photography. Wyeth uses this detail to make the familiar unfamiliar. His painstaking rendering of countless blades of grass in *Winter 1946*, or of wood grains in *Weatherside* (1965), recall a child's reaction when the "enclosed, warm, familiar world [is] suddenly seen as a mere speck in an indifferent and cold universe," writes Brighton.