Stompin’ at the Savoy: A Picture Book Writer Learns the Identity-Politics Dance

by Richard Michelson on April 26, 2006

I’m not black. And I can’t dance. I’m glad we’ve got that out of the way.

My last picture book was titled Too Young for Yiddish. It’s about a Jewish boy in Brooklyn whose grandfather spoke Yiddish. I am Jewish. I grew up in Brooklyn. My grandfather spoke Yiddish. There are other coincidences. “In the old country,” Grandpa Sam (hey, I had a Grandpa Sam) says, “I spoke Yiddish to the chickens,” so the boy in my story wants to learn Yiddish, thinking he too will then be able to talk to the chickens. Grandpa Sam, however, wants his grandson to speak only English, to play baseball, to be 100% American. He shuts the door to his past, and the child doesn’t knock. Death, however, always knocks. Luckily, before Grandpa Sam’s death, the boy realizes he does not know who his grandfather is, or for that matter, who he himself has become. He learns Yiddish, speaks with his grandfather, and hears the story of his past, which he later passes down to his own son, Samuel. (I have a son named Samuel.)

When I speak at Jewish book festivals, I am pleased to see generations talking together after my presentation. But it is the grandparents who rush up to me as I’m packing my bags. “A dank,” they say, “thanks.” And then, in the mother tongue, they begin to tell me their own stories. Sometimes I listen and nod, but most times I stop them at the onset and apologize. “Sorry,” I say, “I hate to disillusion you, but I don’t speak Yiddish.”

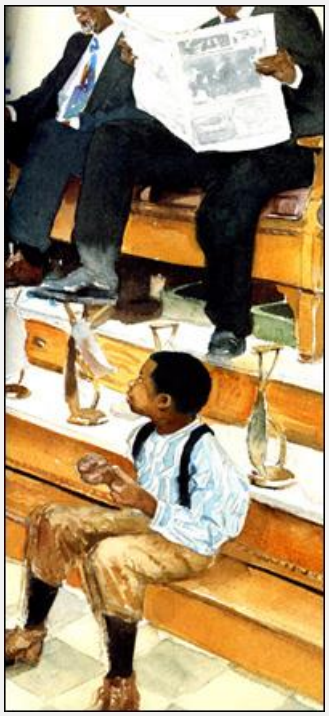

Illustration from Happy Feet

I can understand the disappointment on their faces. But no one has ever suggested that because I don’t speak Yiddish, I should not have written my book.

“I’m a writer.” I explain. “It’s a story.”

Then I add: My new book is about a black child whose father opens a shop, works hard, and gives up his dream of dancing at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem so that he can create an environment where his son might have a better life. (My father opened a shop, worked hard, and gave up his dreams so that someday I might be able to realize mine). “And as you see,” I say, “I’m not black. And I can’t dance.”

“Can I read you the text of Happy Feet: The Savoy Ballroom Lindy Hoppers and Me?” I ask a friend who has studied the Harlem Renaissance. I respect his opinion greatly. He is black, though he grew up among whites, and married white—does that matter? I grew up in a transitional neighborhood. It was a Jewish neighborhood when

I was born, and I am not saying that we would not have joined the white flight if finances allowed. The blacks later fled as the Hispanics moved in.

“Put it back in your drawer,” my friend counseled. “It’s our history. We own it. A black person should write this story. You’ve got no right.”

“But a black person didn’t,” I protested. Must I always write Jewish? I didn’t think so, but then why was I both thrilled and relived when my publisher signed up E.B. Lewis to do the illustrations. E.B. is a brilliant, talented artist and no one can question his African-American credentials, his Coretta Scott King and Caldecott Honors. “It’s everybody’s story,” E.B. told me. “And you’ve nailed the dialect.” I felt vindicated. But why didn’t I press to have my picture on the back flap? And how should I answer my son Sam, who grew up on gangsta rap, despite my ranting and railing—Pull up your pants, embrace your roots, stop acting ghetto; you’re middle-class—when he asks me “What’s up with your recent books? Do you think you’re black?”

Busing Brewster, which is forthcoming, is about a black child bused to an all-white school in Boston. What must that feel like? I tell the story looking through Brewster’s eyes. Would it matter if I told you I was one of three whites at an all-black school? What if I wasn’t? My publisher has not yet chosen an illustrator, and they have asked me for suggestions.

I make mental lists only of black artists as I sit in a Jewish coffee house in the Kazimierz section of Krakow, Poland. I have come in search of my roots. This morning I visited Auschwitz, but tonight I am clapping along to klezmer music. It is an affirmation after the darkness, I tell myself. The Jewish quarter of the city is booming with seekers just like me. During the break, I go to speak to the lead singer. She is beautiful, and I have never heard such an authentic sound. I am transported back to the old country, to my grandfather’s shtetl, which I, of course, never visited in the first place. Did anyone in your family survive, I ask her? Who taught you to play?

“Sorry,” she says. “I hate to disappoint you, but I am not Jewish, nor is anyone in my band. We used to play polka, but then learned the klezmer music to meet the demand from tourists.”

I sit back down next to my wife. She was born Methodist, but converted to Judaism. It is she, not my Grandpa Sam, who brought me back to an appreciation of my own culture. It is she who insisted our young children have a Jewish education. “There’s no excuse,” my grandfather had said, “for marrying outside the tribe. Study, shmudy—she will never understand what it feels like to grow up as Jew.”

I take my wife’s hand and close my eyes as the second set begins. The music might sound the same, but will I hear it differently?

There are certain youthful memories that transcend the past in a way that makes it appear to have been impossibly perfect. This perfection of the past, especially if it occurs in a foreign language, corrects for immigrant anxieties and also compensates for exilic losses.

In the spring of 1985, when the events described here occurred, the political situation in the Soviet Union hardly promised any quick changes of fortune. The "rule of corpses"—Brezhnev's latter years followed by Andropov's brief stint on the Soviet throne—had ended in March

with the passing of Konstantin Chernenko. The 54-year-old power-hungry Mikhail Gorbachev had just been elected general secretary of the Communist Party, and his grip on power was still tenuous.

I remember a particularly fine Sunday morning in April of 1985, one of those liberating mornings in Moscow when everybody knows that winter is over. At the time I was a freshman at Moscow University, a kid from a family of veteran Jewish refuseniks. My friend Maxim Mussel (aka "Krolik=Rabbit"), now a marketing guru and a mobile filmmaker, was then a sophomore at the Moscow Electrotechnical Institute of Communications (nicknamed "Institute of Liaisons"). I left the USSR almost 30 years ago; Krolik is still living in Moscow—not far from the old haunts of our raw Soviet youth.

The author and his friend in an undated photo (courtesy of Maxim Shrayer)

On that morning we met outside the Taganskaya Metro station, across the street from the Theater at Taganka, famous for its Brecht-inspired performances, and followed the streams of molten snow down Taganskaya Street to the Yauza River Embankment, past the Foreign Languages Library and in the direction of the Boulevard Ring, a succession of boulevards encircling the center of old Moscow. On their long necks, the waters carried down into the Yauza pieces of small urban debris, candy wrappers, sticks from Eskimo Pie bars, and beer caps, as we talked of Hesse's Steppenwolf and The Glass Bead Game and also of Cortázar's short story, which inspired Michelangelo Antonioni's film Blow-Up. I was mainly reading Russian authors of past and present, instinctively distrusting translations. Krolik concentrated on non-Russian literature, especially Anglo-American, German, Latin-American, and

Japanese—anything decent he could get his hands on in the Soviet book market.

We were best friends and complemented each other: I a convinced Russophile in my reading habits, Krolik a sworn Westernizer; I a reader of poetry, Krolik of prose and screenplay translations; I a theater-goer, Krolik a fanatical film lover. Krolik was the main source of my knowledge of early Soviet and of Western cinema. He also knew most Beatles songs by heart. Krolik associated the Russian classics with mandatory high-school reading lists, and the Russian-language Soviet authors were to him either sell-outs or imitators; he made an exception for the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Krolik and I lingered for a little while on the Tessinsky Bridge over the Yauza, studying the brackish, sun-splashed water. Then we strolled for awhile on a fragment of the Boulevard Ring, until we came upon a stekliashka, a cafeteria-bar with glass-paneled walls. It was about 11 in the morning and the stekliashka had just opened. Through dirty glass walls we could see early clients holding faceted glasses and resembling old lizards in a dusty terrarium. We entered the stekliashka and inquired at the bar (it was a self-service establishment) what they had to eat and drink.

“We’ve got jerez. And dumplings,” answered a tall woman of about 35, dressed in a low-cut lacy blouse and a pleated skirt. A bespattered apron was tied across her waist, while a semblance of a doily adorned the top of her head, like an Orthodox cross sitting on top of an onion dome. She uttered the short sentence and burst out laughing, coquettishly covering her mouth with both her hands like a true daughter of the Russian urban lower classes. The word jerez seemed so out of place in this establishment. Or did the barmaid laugh because not the wondrous word jerez but the awakening of spring intoxicated her, like the ether that a bored nurse inhales in an empty operating room?

“Jerez, 80 kopecks,” said the woman, whom the drunks congregating in the stekliashka called Valyushka, a diminutive of Valentina. (At the time university tuition was free, a Soviet student’s average monthly stipend amounted to 40 rubles, we were both living at home and couldn’t afford too much of anything without our families’ help.) In pronouncing the word jerez, Valyushka stressed the jer-syllable so sprightly that both Krolik and I thought she was testing the innuendo on us, two students who looked like they came from the Jewish intelligentsia.

“Excellent Crimean jerez,” she repeated again, now obviously stressing the jer (kher) part—kher, a Russian subliterary term which, in tone, would be equivalent to the American dick. Krolik and I each got a faceted glass of jerez and a plate of dumplings. We moved to a high table near the front of the cafeteria, from where we could see the boulevard. There were no chairs, and we stood there for awhile, like two horses, drinking our fill of this Soviet jerez and eating our vinegar-drizzled, clayish dumplings.

We were happy on that April morning. Krolik had just turned 19, I was turning 18 in June. Both of us longed to be someplace else, inside an abstractly composite long shot of a bar or a waterfront café, scents of good cigarettes, perfume, and whiskey tickling our nostrils. We talked,

as we often did in those days, of what it would be like to find ourselves abroad. In the spring of 1985 the chances of this happening were nil, just as the prospects of change in the Soviet Union seemed nonexistent. Yet we still wondered what it would be like to sit in a bar overlooking Narragansett Bay. Krolik was finishing Thornton Wilder's Theophilus North, a novel set in and around Newport, Rhode Island. (He would see Newport for the first time in the summer of 1989, when he first visited me in America.) We had both just seen Death in Venice with Dirk Bogarde at a Visconti retrospective, and we let our imagination run wild and pictured ourselves relaxing in a café in the Laguna. (In August of 1987 I would see Venice with my parents and a group of Jewish refugees traveling in Italy.) Once Krolik and I managed to transform the Soviet grunge and gruffness of our surroundings and insert ourselves into an imaginary panning shot of that fantasized Western bar or café, we went on talking about pressing matters: girls and each other's romantic adventures, books and cinema, Jews and emigration…

In some memories of my Moscow youth I feel so oddly and bewilderingly at peace, that in moments of weakness I start wondering why I left in the first place. Had I experienced the best of friendships in the wrong place at the right time so I would then go on remembering the time even as I keep forgetting the place?

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and his Vice President Faruq Al-Shara (back left) and Foreign Minister Walid Muallem (back right) head the Syrian delegation to the Arab Summit in Riyadh 28 March 2007
(Photo: Awad Awad/AFP/Getty Images)

John Gotti may have once held the title, but the late Gambino crime family boss had nothing on the "Teflon Don" of the Middle East, Bashar Assad. Had Gotti lived to see it, he would be astounded by how easily the two-bit head of a Syrian crime family is getting away with mass murder.

Remarkably, five years after the outbreak of the uprising against him, in which over 450,000 people have been shot, bombed, and gassed for the crime of not wanting to be ruled by a genocidal dictator, Assad is being cheered by many in the West as a protector of endangered minority groups—not to mention as a savior of archeological artifacts. "Hooray," wrote London Mayor Boris Johnson following the assault by Assad's allies that retook the city of Palmyra, "Bravo—and keep going." Sure, Johnson said—mainly for reasons of etiquette—Assad is a monster, a killer and a dictator who, like his father, has ruled through torture, violence and terror, but let's not have that get in the way of cheering him on.

Not only is Assad being lauded as the spearhead of the fight against jihadist terrorism, but the Obama Administration has been notably lax recently in repeating its insistence that he leave power. Behind the scenes, administration heavies like Rob Malley, President Barack Obama's favorite regional troubleshooter; Brett McGurk; and others have been moving heaven and earth to ensure that the regime prevails militarily in Aleppo and elsewhere on the Syrian battlefield. In

fact, as Russia and its allies on the ground appear to be mobilizing for a push on Aleppo, the administration's response has been to give them full cover, falsely claiming that the city is being held primarily by the Nusra Front. Then on Monday, State Department spokesman John Kirby practically advised rebel groups in Aleppo to move out of their positions in the city lest they "get hurt."

And if the Assad regime is now seen as a bulwark against ISIS and the Nusra front, the administration makes no bones about the fact that there can't be an Assad regime without Assad. Commenting on Sec. of State John Kerry's recent visit to Moscow, Russian Deputy Foreign

Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted saying that Russia "found understanding in Washington" that "the future of Syria's president should not be on the agenda at this stage."

Recent reporting in the Arabic press claims that Malley has been negotiating with Russia's special presidential envoy, Alexander Lavrentiev, over the shape of a political settlement in Syria. Malley and Lavrentiev have reportedly been discussing a plan that draws somewhat on the Lebanese model of power sharing, whereby Assad and whatever amenable "opposition" would "share" executive, security, legislative, and judicial authority. U.N. Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura explained what such an arrangement might look like in a surprise proposal to the opposition delegation in Geneva. Assad would remain as president, while appointing three vice presidents picked by the opposition who would have unspecified authority—presumably, to do whatever Assad told them, at the risk of their lives. Malley reportedly briefed President Obama on his talks with the Russians, which the president may have carried with him on his recent tour to the Gulf.

While Obama's Syria policy might appear like a response to recent events, it is continuous with a long-standing White House position. Proposals that would leave Assad as president, but with supposedly limited authorities, have been regularly floated since 2012, the year of Obama's famous red line. By 2013, the White House was already publicizing its regrets about having ever called for Assad to step aside and was briefing media surrogates that it was "not seeking to help the opposition win a civil war." In 2014, after being briefed by the White House, two pillars of what's left of the American foreign-policy establishment, Leslie Gelb and Frank Wisner, called for "sharply and publicly" redefining U.S. objectives, arguing for collaborating with the Assad regime against "jihadi extremism." Gelb and Wisner relayed the view—presumably shared by the White House—that the U.S. president, having been "too quick off the mark and too absolute" in calling for Assad's removal, "perhaps now" was "prepared to entertain a transitional working arrangement," which has since been formalized by the series of Geneva conferences on Syria.

John Gotti could only marvel at how willing the Obama Administration and its claque in the press have been to ignore the river of blood that Assad continues to leave in his wake, which would appall even the most hardened Mafia boss. Nor is Assad's blood lust confined to Syrian civilians who oppose his rule—he murders plenty of other people too, including Americans.

Shortly after taking power, Assad began directing jihadists from the world over via Syria to Iraq in order to kill American soldiers following the 2003 U.S. invasion of that country. Assad's intelligence services directed the same network to do hits and detonate bombs in Jordan and Lebanon. The bombings and murders in Lebanon continued steadily through 2013, killing or maiming over a dozen intended targets (to say nothing of the innocent bystanders). Of those, 10 were Christians—that's not counting a series of random bombings specifically in Christian areas aimed at sending a warning to that community. In 2012 Assad tried to use a Lebanese Christian associate, Michel Samaha, to plant a series of bombs targeting both Christian and Sunni Muslim targets to raise sectarian tensions in Lebanon and then pin the bombings on jihadists. Samaha got caught, but the intelligence chief who uncovered the plot got blown up, in a scene that would have made Francis Ford Coppola smile.

Assad is hardly your run-of-the mill hitman. Where his father, an old-school boss, was known to dissolve his victims' limbs in acid, Bashar gassed thousands of people. And he did it repeatedly over a several months while the United States watched—and did nothing. By then, Assad understood he could get away with pretty much anything, as the Obama Administration wanted to keep out of Syria at all costs. When he pushed the envelope further with a major chemical attack in August 2013, everyone thought that was it. But Obama, with help from Vladimir Putin, got him off the hook with a sweet deal that allowed him to keep on killing people—but with chlorine gas, instead of sarin.

Assad has been getting away with murder for years. Only now, he is regarded as a critical partner against terrorism—even as he partners with Hezbollah on the battlefield. Not only that, he is a hero for "liberating" the ancient ruins of Palmyra. "The victory of Assad is a victory for archaeology," Boris Johnson gushed. Sure, his goons chopped off the genitalia of a 13-year-old boy and sent his bloated, scarred, and bruised body to his parents, but at least he believes in a "degree of civilization."

And now, with near half a million dead, millions of refugees, many deliberately ethnically cleansed, he gets to be part of a "political transition" in Syria and help draft a new "constitution" and run in "elections" that he will organize. As per the principles of U.N. envoy De Mistura, there will be donor conferences to pay for the reconstruction of Syria, which Assad and his friends bombed to rubble, while the world also pays for the millions of refugees lucky enough not to be buried under that rubble. And since Assad will be part of Syria's indefinite "transition," few if any of those refugees will be able or willing to ever return home.

Let John Gotti top that. The most he could hope for, aside from the front page of the Daily News or the cover of People magazine, was to get cheered at a Fourth of July block party in Queens. But Obama has business that's important with Ali Khamenei. He doesn't want it disturbed. And since Assad is backed by Obama's deal partners in Tehran, he shouldn't be touched.

Figure 1Protestors gather in Tahrir Square on February 1, 2011 in Cairo, Egypt
(Photo: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images)

When the corrupt and autocratic regimes of the Arab world began to topple one after another, in the Arab Spring of 2011, it would have taken a cold heart not to share in the hope of so many millions of people. But five years later, it seems that the cold-hearted—those who were skeptical of the possibility of genuine progress, those who warned that revolution would give way to civil war—were right all along. Revolutions never seem to bring the happiness they promise: not in France in 1789 or Russia in 1917, and not in Egypt or Libya or Syria in 2011. Instead, the Middle East has gone from bad—repressive dictatorships built on secret police and theft—to worse—open civil war and genocide.

For Americans witnessing these events, the great question tends to be what role our government played in the disaster. The problem is that there are several plausible answers, all of which contradict each other. In Iraq, America took the most active possible role, invading the country in 2003 to remove Saddam Hussein; today Iraq barely exists, divided irretrievably between Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis. With Iraq in mind, when it came to overthrowing Muammar Qaddafi in Libya in 2011, the UnitedStates and NATO refused to invade, restricting their role to supporting the rebels with air strikes. But today Libya too barely exists, its territory carved up among feuding tribal militias. Looking back on Libya, then, President Barack Obama steadfastly refused to intervene in Syria, even retreating from his own "red line" about the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons. And today Syria barely exists, as rebellion grew into a years-long civil war that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and turned millions into refugees. Into the vacuum has stepped ISIS, the Islamic State, whose barbaric violence and cruelty have shocked the world, though not exactly into action.

Invasion, limited intervention, and nonintervention all turned out, in the Arab world, to have equally disastrous results. Today, the Middle East is so ruinous that most Americans have simply thrown up their hands, resorting to the old platitude that did such hardy service in Yugoslavia—that these are age-old hatreds, which have to be allowed to play themselves out. Pundits now talk of a new Thirty Years' War, unfazed by the fact that the first Thirty Years' War, in Europe in the 17th century, killed perhaps one-third of the population of Germany.

In his new book A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil From Tahrir Square to Isis, Robert Worth does not offer any advice for the State Department or any forecasts of what will

come next in the Arab world. Rather, Worth, a longtime foreign correspondent for the New York Times, offers a series of snapshots and profiles from the Arab Spring and its aftermath, showing how events unfolded at the scale of individual lives. This is an important service, since when we talk about the Middle East, we tend to use large religious and ideological abstractions—Sunnis and Shiites, secularists and Islamists. Worth brings those words back to their roots in the lives of real people, showing how people who never dreamed of making war or revolution ended up being unmade by them.

Perhaps the most painful and illustrative story in A Rage for Order is that of Aliaa Ali and Noura Kanafani, two young Syrian women. In 2011, when the Arab Spring came to Syria and the rebellion against Bashar al-Assad began, Aliaa and Noura were best friends, constantly in and out of each other's houses in the Mediterranean city of Jableh. They paid no attention to the fact that Noura was a Sunni, part of Syria's Muslim majority, while Aliaa was an Alawite, a follower of the minority sect that governed the country through the Assad regime. Indeed, Worth writes that Noura once turned down a marriage proposal from a Sunni suitor because he was so hostile to Alawis: "I can't live with a man who thinks Alawis are forbidden," she told Aliaa.

That these friends would end up as enemies is not exactly a surprise. We have seen the same thing happen too many times, between Serbs and Croats or between Hutu and Tutsi, to be surprised when the claims of the group destroy the bonds of individuals. Still, it feels shocking to read about how Aliaa and Noura turned against each other, driven by the increasing violence between Sunnis and Alawis, the rebels and the regime. The sinister thing about identity is that it is simultaneously the emptiest descriptor—knowing a person's race or religion tells you nothing about what they are like—and potentially the most important. Once people feel threatened as a group, they will start considering themselves solely as members of that group, simply out of self-defense. The threat of violence provokes preemptive violence; both Alawis and Sunnis are convinced that they are the victims of the others' aggression. Today, Noura and Aliaa live in different countries and no longer speak, each full of hatred and suspicion of the other.

How can this be the end of a process that started with so much hope? Worth, who was present in Cairo's Tahrir Square when protests began there in January 2011, felt about the Arab Spring just as Wordsworth did about the French Revolution: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." In Worth's telling, Tahrir Square sounds like a bigger and more earnest version of Zuccotti Park during the Occupy days—a utopian space where society seemed to be recreating itself. Muslim Brothers and secular liberals put their differences aside for the common goal of overthrowing Hosni Mubarak. On Feb. 11, when news came of Mubarak's resignation, Worth saw the crowd react: "People were hugging each other, running wildly back and forth to the balcony, their eyes glowing with tears and disbelief. … In the street, a man running past almost knocked me down, screaming at the top of his lungs, 'Our freedom! Our freedom!' "

But in Egypt, as in Syria and the other places Worth covers, the initial enthusiasm obscured the fatal deficit of trust among citizens. Divisions between liberals and Islamists, civilians and the

military, rebels and supporters of the old regime, proved to be too poisonous and deeply rooted to be overcome. When the Muslim Brotherhood managed to elect their candidate, Mohammed Morsi, to the presidency, many former rebels urged the military to step in and oust him. The new military ruler, Adbel Fattah al-Sisi, immediately became the subject of a cult of personality, his likeness appearing on "flags, pins, pictures, chocolate, cups, and other forms of Al-Sisi mania," in the words of a newspaper article quoted by Worth. When al-Sisi's forces massacred 800 Islamists in Cairo, liberals applauded.

In Egypt, however, at least the state survived. The same can't be said of Yemen, where the decades-long dictatorship of Ali Abdullah Saleh had no sooner ended than Saleh was back at the head of a Shiite coalition, doing battle with Saudi-funded Sunni forces. One aspect of the Arab disaster that Worth could have done more to explain is the role of Saudi Arabia and Iran as outside sponsors of violence: The money and weapons provided by these regional superpowers is what has allowed the violence in Yemen and Syria to continue for so long.

In Libya, too, the disappearance of the dictator exposed a society whose institutions had been totally hollowed out. Libya, like Iraq and many other Arab nations, was a country with no historical identity—it was created by joining together three separate Ottoman provinces—and therefore little ability to inspire loyalty. Here Worth meets a man named Nasser whose brother had been murdered in prison by the Qaddafi regime. Now, after the revolution, Nasser's militia has captured his brother's killers, and he is unsure whether to punish them himself or hand them over to the nominal government. Idealistically, he does the latter—only to find that the evidence he has compiled gets lost, and the prisoners are allowed to escape. In such circumstances, it's no wonder that the tribe and the clan provide the only reliable source of authority and loyalty.

It is the disintegration of countries like Yemen, Syria, and Libya that, in Worth's view, explains the rise and the surprising allure of the Islamic State. As his title A Rage for Order suggests, Worth sees the Arab peoples as motivated not by a longing for freedom or justice, but for something more basic: the rule of law, the basic predictability of life, that only a functioning state (in Arabic, dawla) can provide. "They wanted something they had heard about and imagined all their lives but never really known: a dawla that would not melt into air beneath their feet, a place they could call their own, a state that shielded its subjects from humiliation and despair," he writes at the end of his book.

This is a Hobbesian view of government: Rather than a state of nature where all war against all, better to have a single ruler with a monopoly on violence, no matter how arbitrary. The caliphate declared by ISIS promises just this—a strong government based on religious principles, able to bring order to regions plagued by anarchy and civil war. The reality, of course, is something else entirely. Worth writes about a Jordanian man, Abu Ali, who sneaks into Iraq to fight for ISIS but is so terrified and appalled by its cruelty that within three months he sneaks back out again. Like so many of the men and women in A Rage for Order, he has been condemned by history to live in a time and place that offers no good choices.