

## THE GREAT GAME

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It is 6 PM Mountain Standard Time in Galisteo, New Mexico. Tom Blakeley is snug in his adobe style house on Acequia Verde, waiting for his wife Sally to get home from the State Capitol. Sally is Governor Bill Richardson's chief of staff. Sally and Tom will chat about the Gov's recent problems with his résumé's account of his athletic prowess. Sally has refused any comment on that subject for this paper. Tom does tell me that she seems to be looking at the Governor a little asquint these days. However, we won't hear more from Tom about that or anything else tonight. Sally and Tom will continue to discuss the great game of politics, and perhaps we will hear more of their playing it down the road, in my next paper. For now Tom has left me on my own. I am winging it in more ways than one.

Tonight I summarily throw the great Aristotle overboard. Am I eschewing the great philosopher forever? No, of course not. But for this paper only I abandon the Aristotelian stricture that a work of art must have a beginning, middle and end. There will be no *anagnorisis*. The only pity will be yours for this reader's pitiful vision, and the fear will be what you feel for yourselves as I tell you what the substance of the paper will be.

Trained in English and Comparative Literature and in Law, I cast caution to the winds and announce that tonight's paper will deal first with Modern European history, take a short plunge into the annals of sport, alight briefly in Japanese literature, and for those of you still awake, mercifully end with a disquisition on an example of Grade B American Cinema, based on a turn of the century English novel. No great mystery, then, that this paper started out to be one thing and has turned out to be another. You will see as we proceed. Here goes.

I. One of the great lies of contemporary American political discourse is that the somnambulant 40<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Ronald Wilson Reagan, former minor league baseball announcer and Boraxo salesman was responsible for the fall of Communism. As our friends on the right would have it, Dutch, with his one grandiloquent line, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall" brought the evil Soviet empire not just to its knees but cast it into its grave.

This kind of simplistic thinking is perhaps worthy of American political discourse, but hardly stands even cursory analysis. I invite you to think back only 25 years to the dawn of the Reagan administration. The Soviet Union was a nuclear powered conglomerate of 19 so-called socialist republics, its hegemony stretching from the Pacific to the Baltic, south to the Black Sea, and only an easy march to Vienna from the borders of Hungary, the closest vassal state. We feared the Soviet Union with a bone chilling fear. Nuclear annihilation and slavery to totalitarian ideology were right around the corner.

None of our fears were to come to pass. Though still powerful, the Soviet Union was rotten at the core. The strains of dealing with widely divergent ethnic groups and national ambitions, Muslim, Orthodox, occidental Christian, many interest groups incorporated into the union by main force, were telling and an increasing problem.

It is not easy to remember what life was like in those days. The Neocons have revived the Cold War now, but the menace we now face and fear is the insidious one of creepy Arabs sneaking up on our aircraft, leaving Toyota trucks laden with explosives in front of our public buildings. It is a specter of disembodied fear rather than the image of overwhelming force, missiles laden with nuclear death raining over the poles. Indeed, we may live to see that this George Bush engendered bog of fear, watered and fertilized by the 24-hour cable "news" channels and the supine mainstream media is as empty a threat as that which was posed by the alleged Soviet Red Menace.

When my wife and I walked down the Nevsky Prospekt, the main drag of downtown St. Petersburg a few years ago, it was painfully obvious that the Russians could not build a decent sidewalk, much less pose a realistic threat to American military might and economic muscle. I felt conned. However, as someone once said, Bishop Berkeley perhaps, perception is reality. And, in the 1950's and 60's when I grew up and Hulbert Taft died in an accident in his bomb shelter in Indian Hill, Ohio, the Soviet threat was tragically and mistakenly all too real to most of us. The missiles in Cuba, of course, were real too and the dead Hungarians in the streets of Budapest in 1956 were real, as were the leaders of the Czechoslovak government kidnapped and flown to Moscow to be humiliated in 1968. Always, everywhere the fear that the Reds would emerge from under the bed to rule the world.

Now I am a believer in the great man theory of history. While I concede that economic, social, climatological, geopolitical and various and sundry other forces form the substrata of events, I think that men ultimately shape them.

Thus, with only 20 years left in the last century, the greatest man of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, still very much alive today, was preparing himself for his innings at bat in the great game, the game of nations. I am speaking of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev.

No, it was not the fraudulently avuncular Reagan who destroyed communism. The Soviet system was a bad joke, and it took a man of Gorbachev's hard-headed pragmatism and clear vision to understand that it was a joke and take the resolute steps necessary to bring matters to a head. It is perhaps sad that the huge social experiment that was communism can be summed up in a joke, but it can. I am reminded of the old wheeze about the Soviet railroad system. During the 70 years or so of communism, there were many 5-year plans. The first one, of course, occurred under Lenin. In his time, a great deal of track was laid and cars built, but there were no locomotives. To meet the plan, the passengers got out of the cars and pulled the trains along the track by hand and the 5-year plan was dubbed a success.

Then came Stalin. Again there were goals, but still no locomotives. The remedy was to shoot the engineers, conductors and brakemen and dub the 5-year plan a success. Finally there was Brezhnev. Still no locomotives. So, the passengers solemnly rocked back and forth in the cars pretending that they were in motion, and the 5-year plan was dubbed a success. Succinctly put, that is what Gorbachev faced when he came to power after the betrayal of Stalin's despotism and the pallid reigns, called the "years of stagnation" of such predecessors as Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko.

We only have to think of our own lives and the role of inertia in them to see what a great thing it was for Gorbachev to shake the system. For most of us, progress is forced upon us. The great events in our lives are often caused by external catastrophe: the closing of a business, divorce, the sickness of a wife or child. For better or worse Gorbachev made an affirmative decision to change a system which had caused fear and panic throughout the world, and which had the trappings of an infallible and inevitable religion. He was faced with a still powerful military machine and a huge bureaucracy, the nomenklatura, extremely jealous of its rank and privileges. In his climb to the top through the nomenklatura Gorbachev recognized that the Soviet system was morally and economically bankrupt. He also saw that the disparate peoples of

the Soviet Union could not be held together by force in a world of universal, instantaneous communication where the aspirations of far flung peoples were not necessarily those of the dominant Russians.

What were the antecedents of Gorbachev's resolve? It is more than ironic that Gorbachev himself had suffered under the Stalinist terror as a young boy growing up in the Crimea. Both of his grandfathers were victims of the terror. Born in 1931 in Privolnoye, a small town peopled by ethnic Ukrainians, Gorbachev grew up in the twin crippling conditions of poverty and of being a political outcast because he came from a family of "counter-revolutionaries." During the Great Patriotic War, what we call World War II, his home village was occupied by the German army, which could well have been a death sentence for its citizens under the ultra-paranoid Stalin. After Gorbachev came to power some of his colleagues were shocked to finally learn that he had grown up in an area once occupied by the Wehrmacht.

Given all these handicaps, it was only by dint of hard work, including manual labor in the fields, up to and including the years that he spent at university, that Gorbachev was able to rise above his early conditions. He was admitted to Moscow State University, where he met Raisa Maximovna Titorenko, the love of his life, the woman who answered such questions for the rube from the sticks as "What is ballet?" Raisa gave Gorby the polish and culture he craved and served as his sounding board and help-mate through out his public career before dying in 1999.

At any rate, young Gorbachev graduated with a degree in law. He must have been paying attention to his studies, because one of the main themes of Gorbachev's reforms was respect for and institutionalizing of law in a system that had been essentially despotic and thoroughly lawless. After a short stint in Moscow, he went back to his native Crimea, and became a party apparatchik, although a very hard working one. He came to the attention of members of the Politburo when they went on vacations to the Crimea and he rose quickly within the Soviet apparatus, and eventually was called back to Moscow.

As early as the 1970s he was noticed in the West by some as a man on the rise, and that held true as he took on larger and larger responsibilities and was admitted to the Politburo in 1979, by far the youngest member of the Soviet ruling body. After hemming and hawing at the deaths of Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko which followed one another in rapid succession the members of the Politburo finally recognized the inevitable in 1985 and elevated Gorbachev to General Secretary of the Communist Party, the foremost post in the Soviet Union of the time.

For seven heady years thereafter, what a time it was. The terms “glasnost”, openness, and “perestroika” restructuring, were on everyone’s lips. Gorbachev persuaded, cajoled and bullied his fellow Communists to abolish one party rule, start to open the Soviet economy, establish free elections and open debate, and in general nudge the Soviet system on the way to its inevitable end.

All through the period one could sense that Gorbachev was a man on a high wire, trying in gale force winds not only to maintain his balance but to move forward. Looking back one can see how difficult the process was, as toward the end of his time in power Gorbachev was the victim of an abortive coup d’etat, staged by some of his closest advisors and fellow workers, thwarted only by the courage of his former protégé, successor and nemesis, Boris Yeltsin.

Some say that Gorbachev was riding the tiger that devoured him; that he never wanted Communism to die. There may be truth in that. In a recent book of his, Gorby postulates that the Soviet Union itself did not have to die, but was done in by near sighted politicians—not himself of course. One senses that Gorbachev was a sincere socialist who wanted the system to work. Yeltsin and Putin look all the more like opportunists when put next to him.

His own ideals did not keep Gorbachev from making the pragmatic choices that he felt had to be made, but it did in the end hamper him in dealing with the opportunistic Yeltsin. Moreover, he did make a number of errors, including the turning of guns on protesters in the Baltic Republics. Late in the day he turned his back on many of the true reformers and foolishly trusted the thugs who launched the August 1991 coup d’etat that gave Yeltsin his entrée to power.

But look for only a moment at what Gorby did accomplish. The Cold War that dogged our lives from the end of World War II is over or at least in abeyance. Today the nations of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, a reunited Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, the nations of the former Yugoslavia, the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, , and to a greater or lesser degree, the Russian Federation itself and such former client states as Azerbaizan, Belarus, Moldova and the various “stans” are free states, with relatively free travel and commerce. While we don’t know how far Vladimir Putin will carry Russia back into despotism, one senses, or at least hopes that it will not return so far as to the days of the Iron Curtain. The world at large no longer has to live in fear of the Red menace and the social

experiment of Communism except in China and such odd pockets as North Korea and Cuba is laid to rest.

This was an amazing achievement. Without Gorbachev's vision and courage, the will of a man to turn his back on the very system that had nurtured him and given him success, to embark on a social experiment that led to his own political demise, this burst of freedom would not have happened when and as it did.

In a later election for President of the Russian Federation won by Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev was able to garner only somewhat less than 1% of the vote. In killing the Soviet Union, Gorbachev did himself in, at least in the eyes of his fellow Russians. It has been left to lesser men, Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and whatever else will follow to see where the metamorphosis of the Russian state will lead. Wherever it does, there are few men who make such a difference, who affect the tide of force and emotion that controls human destiny.

Like only a very few in our lifetime, Roosevelt and Churchill come to mind, both from backgrounds of great privilege, this peasant boy from rural Crimea rose to the pinnacle of power and was a force for good, indeed, one of the still points on which shifted the turning world. Compare him for a moment with the great Churchill. Magnificent as Sir Winston's achievements were, in one sense, the Englishman had no real choice. If England was to survive, Churchill had to act. Gorbachev by contrast very well could have let the moment pass him by and live out his life in power and luxury, and let history make its own consequences. But no, he chose to act, making a free choice, an amazing series of free choices for which we are all the richer.

Today Gorby seems a bitter man, stunned and amazed that he does not receive more credit for his achievements, especially in the former Soviet Union. He runs a think tank and other do-gooder organizations in Moscow and elsewhere that seem more than a little Quixotic. Gorby frequently shows up in world capitals to gather the accolades that are not showered upon him back home. This is too bad. We owe him much. Hopefully, before he dies, he will have his due, even in his own land. Even if not, I know that history will be kind to him.

II. We take a broad turn for a moment from the game of nations to my favorite participatory game. It is probably snotty of me to say it, but I suspect that the person of whom I next speak probably knows little of Mikhail Gorbachev. I can say this with some modicum of

assurance, as his profile on the PGA Tour website tells us that one of my second figure's favorite pastimes is visiting Disney theme parks. Disney theme parks indeed.

Now in his 16th year as a touring golf professional, Robert Gamez is a minor figure on the PGA Tour. He will never rank with the likes of Palmer, Nicklaus, Woods or Mickelson or even Davis Love or Fred Couples, two of Tom Blakeley's favorite golfers. Gamez will be remembered for winning twice on the Tour in his first full season, including his first event as a pro. Robert Gamez had been college player of the year in 1989, his senior year at the University of Arizona. When he turned pro in 1989 his first event was in Tucson, and he shot out the lights, winning the event. Only a month or so later, he eagled the 18th hole at Bayhill on the fourth day to snatch victory from the great white shark, Greg Norman, the world's number one golfer of the era, well into the 333 weeks in all in which he would reign as number one.

But all of that is now 15 years ago, and when I sat down to start writing this paper, Gamez had not won on the Tour since. He was a very likely underdog, which I am sure you begin to divine is one of the themes of this paper. Indeed Gamez had traveled a very rocky road in his life as a touring professional. When Gamez burst upon the scene I was just beginning to golf, and very sporadically. His early phenomenal success tickled me. I followed him for a period of time as he picked up the reputation of an early John Daly, a guy with enormous talent who would rather drink and party than golf.

As that reputation and the fruits of it marred his game, I lost track of him. In fact I was shocked one morning four years ago to see Gamez's name in the sports pages of the Cincinnati Enquirer. Over the course of three days or so in the autumn of 2001, I followed his attempt to regain his Tour card at the PGA qualifying school in Florida. I learned that he had lost his card after being involved in a disastrous automobile accident during the Kemper Open some years before.

I found myself disappointed for him when he failed to regain his card by one stroke in the qualifying school tournament. But I had the bug and watched as Gamez scratched his way into a few events that spring and summer as an alternate. He had some good finishes and finished the season among the top 125 golfer on the Tour. This meant that he was exempt from qualifying for all regular PGA events the following year. He had regained his Tour card.

I have followed Gamez since and even wrote him a fan letter (which, of course he failed to answer), the only fan letter I have written in my life. I see now that Gamez is a streaky player.

He had a hole in one on 17 in the third round of the 2004 US Open; he shot a 29 on the front 9 in another tournament the same year to set a course record. I have also seen him shoot a 10 on the final hole of a tournament, costing him thousands of dollars. He has tended to fade in the final round of many tournaments and is prone to record a 68 by shooting 6 birdies and 4 bogies in the same round, if not a 74, 4 birdies and 6 bogies, maybe including a double bogey or a triple.

Nevertheless, I have been fascinated by this weekly warrior playing a game I love, not at the very highest, but a very high level and with a very human mixture of success and if not failure, lack of maximum achievement. Be that as it may, he has made his living playing the game I presume he loves even making \$1,500,000 in prize money in 2003.

Nevertheless as this paper approached, I found myself increasingly dismayed by Gamez's continued laboring in the doldrums. After finishing 110<sup>th</sup> in prize money in 2004, perilously close to the 125 cut off, Robert seemed slated for oblivion. After a quick start this year in season opening events in Hawaii and on the Coast, he missed the cut in tournament after tournament this summer and fall. Gamez was mired in the 140s on the money list and sinking further by the week. My heart ached for him when he missed the cut at something called the 84 Lumber Classic at Nemaocolin Golf Club in western Pennsylvania late this summer. This is assuredly a second echelon tournament populated by the pros who do not qualify for the British Open, played the same week. I figured then that Gamez was really, truly through. He would lose his card and I would hear no more of him until there was a brief flash of glory when he turned 50 some 12 years down the road and went on the Senior tour.

Imagine then, my surprise, nay wonder, a couple of weeks later, when I saw Robert featured on the Tour web site, resplendent in a bright, tangerine golf shirt and matching Titleist visor. Robert was first out of the blocks at something called the Valero Texas Open in San Antonio, and stormed in over that weekend to win by three strokes, closing a span of 15 years six months between victories. This dubious PGA record encompassed more than 350 losing efforts. As the pro at my club laconically commented, that is a lot of grinding it out.

As I breathlessly watched the Texas Open, perhaps the only guy in America to view all six hours of television coverage that weekend, I learned that Gamez had not gone home after missing the cut at the 84 Lumber Classic but had stayed and spent the next two days on the practice range at Nemaocolin, aptly named the John Daly Practice Center. I can hardly imagine the range of thoughts and emotions that went through the man's head as he hit golf ball after golf

ball with no assurance it was going to change his life whatsoever. It hadn't in 15 years. Why should it now? My Titleist visor is off to him for coming back from all the adversities that faced him: car crashes, debilitating injury, shots gone astray, his own bad habits, to give himself, as he put it in his victory interview, a chance at a second career, a whole new start. After 16 years of some success and lots of failure, he is still only 38 years old. Unlike Gorbachev, let us hope that past is not prologue, that his best years are before him, that he achieves greatness in this great game of a much different stripe.

III. Now we turn from the game of nations and from my favorite participatory sport to the great indoors to talk about one of the finest novelists of the age. This is only fitting. Despite my interest in politics and in golf, as well as in many other sports, I have led a fairly bookish life, first as a teacher, and later as a man who has read more about exotic climes, great risks and interesting people and situations than I have had the good fortune or the courage to experience.

This portion of the paper will perhaps be a voyage of discovery because, as I start to write this, I can unabashedly say that contemporary Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, is for me like T.S. Eliot in The Wasteland. I know I love his works and he thrills me but I don't quite know what the hell he means.

It took me years to get around to reading Murakami. There are lots of good, even great Japanese novelists. I have read Yukio Mishima's Sea of Fertility tetralogy, even borrowing at least one motif from that masterpiece for an early Tom Blakeley memoir read here some years ago. There are the haunting Snow Country and Thousand Cranes of Kawabata, as well as Junichiro Tanizaki's Makioka Sisters and many other works of the same caliber.

But none of these really prepared me for Murakami. Before Murakami settled down to writing full-time for a living, he managed a couple of jazz bars in Tokyo and the Western influences show. They more than show because they are, in a sense, part of the meaning of Japanese life that Murakami attempts to portray. Murakami's Japan is one that has in large measure, turned its back on its own past, not totally, unlike what Gorbachev forced an unwilling Soviet Russia to do. Murakami's characters live in a world of Johnnie Walker Black Label, Bach and Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, Western cuts of meat and ready to eat dishes, while still being thoroughly Japanese.

When Murakami's characters leave Tokyo for more primitive, traditional regions of Japan, it is as if they were going to a foreign country, almost a foreign universe and it's often the case that they are looking for people, lovers generally, who have dropped out of our reality and live in a never-never land somewhere between the traditional Japan and the modern Japan that is death itself. Brooding over the modern Japan that has half forgotten its past is the Japan of the 30's and 40's. You don't come to this in the early Murakami. Norwegian Wood is a young woman's bildungsroman, kind of a distaff Sorrows of Young Werther with the central female figure declining into suicide. Other examples of Murakami's craft, combine a larger canvas with Western, almost silly titles like Sputnik Sweetheart and Dance Dance Dance.

But, somehow, none of this prepares you for his masterpiece, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. Only time will tell us how great The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is. There is something for everyone in this book. As the story opens Toru Okada, underdog, outsider, narrator and central figure of the book, finds himself increasingly alone. His cat disappears. His wife leaves him. He starts getting pornographic phone calls for no good reason. Mysterious girls, sisters, who are probably prostitutes, but certainly have mystical powers appear. The Kano sisters, absurdly named Malta and Creta after the Mediterranean islands give him easy sex, but not much other satisfaction.

He has a more fulfilling intellectual relationship with a cheeky teenage girl, May Kasahara who leaves him at the bottom of a well where he sometimes goes to try to figure things out. Toru is a very passive figure, bewildered by modern life. At one point he learns that he has clairvoyant powers himself and becomes either a seer or a male prostitute, you are never quite sure which, working with a mysterious woman and son, Nutmeg and Cinnamon, who drive a massive Mercedes and have an office in an anonymous part of downtown modern Tokyo.

Lurking in the background is a hideously accurate portrayal of a modern Japanese politician, the brother of Toru's disappeared wife. The brother, Noboru looks very much like the American politicians who go on to second careers as commentators on Fox News or CNN—glib, cynical, without any redeeming interest in values whatsoever. Joe Scarborough and Pat Buchanan come to mind. At one point Noboru, we are told, had raped Creta Kano, and he shows himself to be a thoroughly despicable character in the course of the book before his sister kills him, a fate we agree he richly deserves.

Interspersed with these domestic if magical stories is a searing look at the Japan of the Second World War. Told through the voices of veterans of the war, we are treated to images of atrocities by the Russians in Japan's Outer Mongolian campaign of the 1930s and equally hideous crimes committed by the Japanese army in Manchuria during the Sino-Nipponese conflict. A central event here is the graphic and incongruous description of Japanese soldiers beating the members of a Chinese baseball team to death with their own baseball bats.

The whole story is unnerving, made more so by the resemblance of Japanese culture to our own. The presence of so much American influence cheapens Japanese life at the same time as it points out the hollowness and emptiness of American video, fast food "culture". Like the earlier, historical figures dealt with in this paper, the narrator Toru is an under dog. In his own passive way he strives to keep his identity and his sense of himself in a world almost bewilderingly beyond his comprehension. Holding on to his sense of himself, he is rewarded in some measure when both his cat and even his wife come back to him in the final pages of the lengthy novel. The reader hopes for a better future for him but realizes that he is up against almost impossible odds. Both Japanese and American cultures seem nightmarishly complex, cheap and empty. The individual must struggle against incredible odds to survive, and whether he will remains an open question.

IV. Finally, Coda. How do I draw the disparate strands of this paper together? Here is a start. Gorbachev and Gamez are unlikely figures who rose to success against great odds and who have been under-recognized and unappreciated. We have also glanced at a complex Japanese artwork that resonates out there beyond total intellectual comprehension. Murakami is something of an underdog as well, not a typical Japanese company man, coming up from the Tokyo jazz bar world to write incredibly good literature, largely unknown by an uncomprehending English speaking public. His literary doppelganger, Toru Okada is certainly an underdog as well, trying to maintain his identity and find some meaning in the oppressively meaningless welter of post World War II Japan.

And why would I link them together? That is the part of the paper that grew as I wrote it. I first thought that this paper would simply be one of those "two or three things I love" numbers. Vaingloriously, I must have thought that I would amaze and delight you by showing the quirky range of my interests. But as I wrote and thought about it, the question, "Why?" "Why this

theme and these figures, real and literary?” came more and more to the fore. The answer only gradually came to me.

I now see that the answer starts on an evening fifty years ago in Louisville, Kentucky. It was summer, and the air must have been thick with the oppressive humidity of the Ohio Valley and the incessant twilight clatter of Kentucky crickets. It must have been in 1952 or 53, that night when Grover Cleveland Potts Jr., S. J. Young, Tommy and Charlotte Badgett, and Cele and Tony Covatta walked the several blocks from Delor and Keswick Avenues in the Germantown section of Louisville to the Preston Theater on Preston Highway, logically enough, to see the 1950 Technicolor production of Kim, a reasonably faithful if awkward rendition of the Kipling novel.

These were innocent times, the late days of Truman or the start of the first Eisenhower administration, when people let young children walk several blocks to the neighborhood theater unaccompanied. No adult went with us, as we walked the streets and alleys of our neighborhood to get to the theater. None needed to. We were perfectly safe. Back to the cinema: Resplendent in Technicolor, Kim starred a very young Dean Stockwell as Kim, and Erroll Flynn as the swashbuckling Red Beard, a British free booter of some help to the Raj. The character Kim was apprentice and bodyguard to a Buddhist holy man (yes, I know—this is India, and Kipling gave us a Buddhist holy man, not a Hindu) attired in bright red boots, flowing red robes and a ridiculous red fedora-like hat, of Dali-esque proportions.

All of this is information that I did not have and did not remember when I started this paper. For many years I had been troubled in my dreams by a disturbing image: a broken plate, its shards coming together under the force of some unseen powers. I felt in my dream that the plate was not supposed to come together and I had to fight against the image, which I always did, awakening disquieted and nervous. As I ruminated over the subject matter of this paper, this dream scene came to me more and more often. I came to realize, I am not sure how, that this dream scene of the broken plate came from that movie of Kim that I had seen some fifty years before, one summer night at the Preston Theater.

I mentioned all this to my family, and Holland my elder daughter was nice enough to send me a DVD she found of the 1950 Kim film. I watched it some weeks ago with my two grandsons. All came clear. Kim was an orphan, a fatherless British child on the streets of India, footloose in Lahore. A young child, he still made his way in the world by his wits. Eventually

he fell into the hands of the British Secret Service, which recruited the dark skinned Kim, bronzed from his life in the streets, as a spy. As Kipling put it in the novel, the adults were inaugurating Kim in *The Great Game*. Caught between two worlds, Kim lived as a secret agent among the Indians with whom he had grown up and as a rude, uncultured native boy among the Brits. He was the ultimate underdog. When Lurgan, one of the British secret agents, tried to hypnotize him to test the strength of his will, Kim fought against Lurgan's suggestion that he would see a broken plate, thrown on the floor, come back together. This scene resonates for me in Kipling's novel more than in the film, for in the book, Kim fights off the hypnotic suggestion by reciting the multiplication tables over and over, an activity painfully familiar to me. In both book and movie Kim adamantly refuses to see something that is not true, to say that what is not so is so. I can remember as a young boy reciting the multiplication tables over and over. I can also remember the antecedents of a habit of a lifetime—my refusing to see things for other than what they are.

There it all was. The viewing of the film with my own grandsons brought it back, and together. My own father was impossibly busy with work at multiple jobs and distant and tired when he was at home. I always sensed that my mother was hostile to me even though I felt her love. I always felt out of place in my own little world of Louisville. Without familial wealth or the backing of powerful friends and in the intellectual clutches of the benighted Catholicism of those days, I needed to live by my wits and overcome my conditions, turning my back on the world in which I was growing up, which I resolutely did. I did not like my conditions and did not ever settle for their being satisfactory when they were not.

Thus my love and admiration for Gorbachev, the man from humble beginnings who brought down the system that nurtured and poisoned him at the same time; my interest in Gamez, the talented golfer who has had to battle external adversity and his own demons to achieve the modicum of success I hope he will yet build upon. For Murakami's *Wind-Up Bird* hero, I have the same admiration. I admire his fighting for his own identity in a bewildering and meretricious world, one that does not value even the things about itself that are true and beautiful.

Gorbachev, Gamez, Kim and Murakami's Toru Okada, an unlikely platoon of heroes, not a platoon of unlikely heroes are yet figures I can not help but admire. Each in his own way, whether in life or in literature has played against impossible odds at the great game of life, and has played the game while being true to his basic principles. All are heroes in the great game,

where in the end, winning is not winning, but doing one's all. Part of doing one's all is being true to one's inner voice, the vision that one must do this or that, that there are some compromises that cannot be made, that a bit more practice or hard work may make the difference, above all that what you see is really there, that the broken plate does not come back together just by saying so or agreeing with someone that it must be so.

I see quite clearly now that these are the things that motivate me. I cannot yet see why it had to be that way for me from the very beginning. But I do doubt very much that I will dream about that broken plate again.

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