The Washington Post published an expose accusing other news outlets of spreading Russian propaganda during the 2016 presidential election. The problem: it was probably based on propaganda.

**What We’re Reading**

**Daily Signal**

The Seventh of December, Remembered

Wednesday was the 70th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Read an excerpt of December 1941: 31 Days that Changed America and Saved the World, which chronicles that “date which will live in infamy.”

**Weekly Standard**

Woefully Out of Touch

President Barack Obama sat down with Rolling Stone—which was just found liable for defamation after publishing a rape hoax—and complained about “fake news” while complimenting the magazine’s “great work.”

**New York Post**

Castro Feasted While Cuba Starved

Fidel Castro told the people of Cuba that he made 900 pesos ($45) per month and lived in a hut. This, of course, was fiction. In fact, while Cubans were living like peasants, Castro was living like royalty.

**Wall Street Journal**

Breaking Down “Bottleneckers”

Across the United States, occupational licensing is enabling competition to be stifled by “bottleneckers”—those who use government regulations to perpetuate their own advantages in a market.

**New Yorker**

The Propagandas About Russian Propagandas

The Washington Post published an expose accusing other news outlets of spreading Russian propaganda during the 2016 presidential election. The problem: it was probably based on propaganda.

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**BOOK REVIEW** / By Andrew A. Yerbey

**An Appreciation of Appreciations**

**A Torch Kept Lit: Great Lives of the Twentieth Century**

By James Rosen

Edited by James Rosen

(Crown Forum, 357 pages, $22)

Had there never been a William F. Buckley Jr., American conservatism would look very different—and so might the world. “All great biblical stories begin with Genesis,” George Will wrote in the wake of an election that saw a sitting president lose—in a landslide—to a quintessentially conservative candidate named Ronald Reagan. “Before there was Ronald Reagan there was Barry Goldwater and before Barry Goldwater there was National Review, and before there was National Review there was Bill Buckley with a spark in his mind, and the spark in 1980 has become a conflagration.” Twenty-five years later, Will would complete the chain: “Without Reagan, no victory in the Cold War. Therefore, Bill Buckley won the Cold War.”

William F. Buckley Jr. wrote fifty-five books in his lifetime, starting with God and Man at Yale (1951) and ending with The Reagan I Knew (2008), which he was finishing at the time of his death. In the foreword to that book, his son wrote that there continued to be interest in publishing collections of Buckley’s writings, and expected more to be released in the future, quipping: “My father writes more books dead than some authors do alive.” The latest such collection is A Torch Kept Lit: Great Lives of the Twentieth Century, a compilation—edited by Fox News correspondent James Rosen—of “more than fifty of Buckley’s best eulogies.”

That description does not quite capture the essence of the essays in the book. Those essays do not conform to the definition (taken from fifth edition of The American Heritage Dictionary, on the usage panel of which Buckley sat) of a eulogy (“a laudatory speech or written tribute, especially one paying homage to someone who has died”) nor of an obituary (“you would think that after almost an notice of a death, sometimes with a brief biography of the deceased”), although they often contain elements of both. Buckley, with his jeweler’s eye for le mot juste, usually included such essays in his collections under the title “Appreciating.”

It is indeed the right word for them—eulogies—as it captures what Buckley intended to accomplish: to recognize the quality, value, significance, or magnitude of the person he was writing about. These appreciations are often personal, sometimes “purely personal,” yet never blankly so. Always there is a sober evaluative element, which tends to increase in tandem with the subject’s historical stature. Consider Buckley’s appreciation of Winston Churchill. Buckley did not personally know the great man, but he had a very personal understanding of his great achievements. At the age of twelve, in England for boarding school, Buckley happened to be at the Heston Aerodrome when Neville Chamberlain, arriving back from Berlin, deplaned with his misbegotten “peace for our time” paper bearing the signature of Adolf Hitler. Buckley was grateful for Churchill’s resolve in defeating Hitler—under Chamberlain’s leadership, he had to be fitted for a gas mask—but regretful of “the final imperfection of Churchill’s life”: that Churchill had been “incapable of seeing that everything he had said and fought for applied equally to the Russian, as well as to the German, virus.” That is, Churchill had failed to recognize in the Communists the evil he had recognized in the Nazis. Buckley ends the essay with a thunderclap: “May [Churchill] sleep more peacefully than some of those who depended on him.”

Writing well about the deceased is an “elusive art form,” as Rosen notes in his introduction, but one at which Buckley excelled. The safest approach is to be bland and formulaic. Buckley is never either. Witness his appreciation of Nan Kempner, the New York City socialite who was his wife’s good friend. Buckley seems to have been at once bemused and delighted by Kempner, whom he describes as helping herself to food on his plate (“What one thinks one’s own food, she considered common property if she was seated anywhere near you”) and inviting herself to stay at his home (“I’m coming to you for a week,” she would say”). She had a “near-sensual devotion to the art of clothing” and an “ability to enhance with her couture any scene at all.” Buckley found her “rather aloof husband” equally bemusing, if less enchanting. “Every Christmas I receive, along with 100 other recipients, one or more didactic books from him, each with a covering letter describing their singularity,” Buckley writes, chagrined. “You would think that after almost sixty years of companionship, he’d have elected to send around at least one book written by me.” This is all in great humor, as if Buckley were celebrating Kempner’s life in the style she lived it—with a twinkle, not a tear, in his eye.

The essays that Rosen has compiled in A Torch Kept Lit show Buckley appreciating a wide variety of people, spanning presidents, statesmen, generals, spies, academics, generals, spies, and authors, as well as family members, friends, and nemeses. Included are historic figures such as John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Martin Luther King Jr., and Princess Diana; boldface names such as Truman Capote, Johnny Carson, Jerry Garcia, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley; and private persons too. All are fascinating, even those unknown to the reader, because “the greatest pleasure of this volume”—as Rosen states at the outset of this fine collection—is “Buckley’s distinct voice.”

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**sumnum bonum | soom uh boh nym |**

noun

- the greatest or supreme good; especially, the principle of goodness according to which all other moral values and priorities are derived.


“If Benton had had an administration with pillars it could have carved over the pillars: Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you feel guilty. Just as ordinary animal awareness has been replaced in man by consciousness, so consciousness had been replaced, in most of the students of Benton, by social consciousness. They were successful in teaching most of their students to say in contradistinction to anything whatsoever: it was I, Lord; it was I, but they were not so successful in teaching them to consider this consciousness of guilt a sumnum bonum. . . . Many a Benton girl went back to her nice home, married her rich husband, and carried a fox in her bosom for the rest of her life—and short of becoming a social worker, finding a New-Sozialist partner, and then killing herself and leaving her insurance to the United Nations, I do not know how she could have got rid of it.”

—Randall Jarrell, *Pictures from an Institution* (1952)