

room for doubt about the event Orwell described in *Homage to Catalonia*, the attempted Communist coup against the Republican government in Barcelona in May 1937. Far from being a spontaneous reaction to disorder, it was a carefully choreographed attempt to provoke a crisis and then take advantage of it. It is weirdly fascinating to read the letters sent from Spain to the desk of Marshal Voroshilov in Moscow, coldly analyzing the obstacles to a successful putsch. (There seems a high probability that this is the deadly prose of André Marty, the French Comintern agent whose reptilian character was caught by Ernest Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.)

A succeeding document would have interested Orwell very much if he had lived to see it. Regretting the failure of the party's initial plan, the author of the document tells Moscow of the need for a show trial of the Trotskyists and other subversive elements, along the lines of the macabre charade already enacted in the Soviet Union. (From Soviet secret police documents published by Alba and Schwartz, we already know that potential defendants before such a tribunal included Orwell and his wife.) There are

moments when documents seem to speak aloud: I am still reeling from this one.

The survivors of the International Brigades publish a journal that presumably will have to review this volume; it will be interesting to see how they confront the frigid cynicism of the archive. It is clear that the brave volunteers were repeatedly and systematically manipulated, and their reputation exploited, by a nexus of commissars whose names very often turn up in the later Stalinization of Eastern Europe. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, this book is not just another rebuke to misguided idealism. It shows that Spanish democracy was vital and vivid enough to resist the false friend in Moscow, to continue fighting Hitler's and Mussolini's mercenaries at the same time, and ultimately to outlive both communism and fascism. Some defeats are exemplary as well as moving, and the murder of the Spanish Republic is indubitably preeminent among them.

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Dream Depot

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL:

Railroads, Engineering, and Architecture in New York City.

By Kurt C. Schlichting.

Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. 208 pp. \$26.50

GRAND CENTRAL:

Gateway to a Million Lives.

By John Belle and Maxinne R. Leighton. Norton. 192 pp. \$39.95

Reviewed by Tom Lewis

The spring of 1913 in New York saw three important events in America's cultural life. On lower Broadway, merchant prince Frank W. Woolworth opened the world's tallest skyscraper, a 792-foot Gothic masterpiece whose height would not be eclipsed until the completion of the

Chrysler Building in 1930. On seeing the five-and-ten tower, the popular Methodist divine Samuel Parkes Cadman declared it nothing less than St. John's vision of paradise and proclaimed it the "Cathedral of Commerce." In the 69th Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue, the International



Sunlight streams through Grand Central Terminal's unobstructed windows in an early 20th-century photograph.

Exhibition of Modern Art introduced Americans to 1,600 avant-garde European and American works. While the curious professed shock at Marcel Duchamp's cubist *Nude Descending a Staircase*, more thoughtful viewers understood that they were witnessing a profound change in modern aesthetics. And, on 42nd Street, the new Grand Central Terminal opened. Travelers immediately recognized Grand Central as more than just a station. It was a soul-uplifting monument, a dramatic entrance to a great city. When you stepped off the train from South Bend or Toledo or Rochester into the marble-walled main concourse and looked up at the constellations on the barrel-

vaulted ceiling 125 feet above, you knew you had arrived.

The story of Grand Central is a true American tale, featuring selfless heroes and self-serving villains, visionary designers and rapacious developers—plus a triumphal ending. A professor of sociology at Fairfield University, Kurt C. Schlichting writes with deep understanding of Grand Central's engineering feats and artistic qualities. Though John Belle was the principal architect in Grand Central's recent restoration, and Maxinne Leighton is an associate partner in Belle's firm, the two have produced a careful appreciation of the termi-

nal's architectural history rather than a self-promoting puff piece. The publication of two books on the same subject within a year often leads to questions of which is better. In this case, we have eloquent companions rather than rivals: Schlichting's book largely considers the engineering and construction of Grand Central, while Belle and Leighton's considers the great terminal's cultural importance, as well as its preservation and restoration.

Grand Central as we know it first existed in the mind of a self-taught engineer from Buffalo, William J. Wilgus. By the turn of the century, the once imposing and elegant Grand Central Depot that Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt had built on the site in 1871 seemed seedy and dangerous. The *New York Times* condemned it as "a cruel disgrace to the metropolis." But development around the depot prohibited horizontal expansion. Wilgus, chief engineer of the New York Central Railroad, proposed a solution in 1902: Use the same land and build a new terminal vertically.

Under Wilgus's plan, trains would arrive and depart on two underground levels—79 acres of train yard between Lexington and Madison Avenues stretching north to 56th Street. A loop track would eliminate the switching and shunting needed to get departing trains headed in the right direction. Electricity would replace steam as the motive force for the engines. Most important, the railroad would sell the "air rights" above the buried tracks. The vast, grimy train yard would be transformed into city blocks bustling with people—and the sale of these rights would finance the new terminal. "Thus from the air," Wilgus said, "would be taken wealth."

It's difficult to overstate the importance of Wilgus's proposal. Before Wilgus, the tracks serving Grand Central ran along the surface of what is now Park Avenue. The rails divided communities and brought urban blight. (One need only compare the difference in land value between, say, 87th Street and Park Avenue, where the tracks run underground, and 10 blocks north at 97th Street, where they emerge into Harlem.) And the "Terminal City" that Wilgus envisioned would be erected on the air rights ultimately became a well-integrated mix of hotels, apartments, and

office buildings, anticipating by several decades the development at New York's Rockefeller Center.

In the years that followed his proposal, Wilgus solved the vast three-dimensional puzzle of excavating the train yards and constructing a new underground terminal without disrupting train service. He planned the conversion of the engines from steam to electricity and negotiated with General Electric to build the locomotives. Collaborating with another engineer, Wilgus even designed a safety cover to protect workers from the third rail. When the first of the new locomotives pulled out in September 1906, Wilgus sat at the controls.

Five months later, it all went sour. One of the new electric locomotives flew off the tracks while rounding a bend in the Bronx. Twenty passengers died and scores more were injured. The New York district attorney investigated Wilgus for negligence, and, though he defended himself vigorously, his relationship with the New York Central officers deteriorated. He resigned in September 1907. At that point, William J. Wilgus became a non-person in the history of Grand Central, forgotten by all but a few.

While Wilgus is responsible for the creation of the underground terminal, Whitney Warren may take credit for most of Grand Central above ground. His story is not always honorable. Initially, Warren's architectural firm was to build the new terminal in collaboration with a St. Louis firm, Reed and Stem, whose principal contribution to the project is the ramps that enable passengers to move easily through the terminal's various levels. When a partner in the St. Louis firm died, Warren connived for his own firm to become the sole architects. Though neither book speculates on the motive, we can probably attribute Warren's machinations to his enormous ego. Recognizing Grand Central's importance to New York, America, and architectural history, he wanted his name to stand alone as that of its architect. For this breach of professional ethics, the American Institute of Architects expelled Warren from its ranks.

Ethical considerations aside, we owe to Warren and his patron William K. Vanderbilt, grandson of the Commodore, the monumental Grand Central we see today. While Reed

and Stem had proposed a 12-story office building for the site, Warren substituted a classical Beaux-Arts terminal with only limited commercial space. It was Warren, too, who commissioned the gargantuan statue of Mercury flanked by Minerva and Hercules for the terminal's south face. In the final analysis, Warren truly was the chief architect of Grand Central.

The opening of Grand Central marked the high point of passenger rail travel and the high point of civic responsibility on the part of America's railroads. Automobiles were about to open up new suburban lands, just as the railroads had earlier. In the decades that followed, as the market shrank and money became dearer to the railroads, the quality of passenger service declined. More and more rail executives seemed to be living by the maxim first uttered by William Vanderbilt's father: "The public be damned."

When America fell into the Great Depression, Grand Central began to feel pressure from sources other than the automobile and indifferent rail executives. In 1932, while workers were putting the final touches on the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, one of the last buildings in the Terminal City, New York's Museum of Modern Art mounted a show of Bauhaus architecture. Philip Johnson, the director of the museum's architecture division, declared the Beaux-Arts school dead. Serious architects began rejecting dense brick and stone for other styles, ultimately open-box skeletons covered in glass. In the 1950s, Johnson worked with Mies van der Rohe to design the Seagram Building, which replaced the Montana Apartments, one of the original buildings of Terminal City.

By then, as Belle and Leighton make clear, the New York Central Railroad had fallen into the hands of stock manipulators, who greedily looked to the real estate at 42nd Street as a way of turning a quick profit. They tarted up the main concourse, first with a giant Kodak photo screen that obliterated the east balcony, and then with a huge clock advertising *Newsweek*. On the floor level, Merrill Lynch built a sleek booth with ticker-tape machines, and Chrysler installed a display of its latest-model cars.

Having marred the inside, real estate moguls turned their attention to the outside.

Here they had the aid of ego-driven, arrogant architects. In 1954, I. M. Pei proposed replacing Grand Central with a 108-story "hyperboloid" skyscraper that suggested an oversized cooling tower for a nuclear plant. Fortunately, the project went nowhere. In 1963, however, developers did succeed in constructing a 59-story glass-and-concrete octagonal pile known as the Pan Am building behind the station.

Then, in 1968, Marcel Breuer designed a 55-story skyscraper resembling a massive tombstone that would be cantilevered over Grand Central. Meeting resistance, Breuer designed a second tombstone that would obliterate the exterior of the terminal. When New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission used its authority to reject these proposals, Breuer accused it of thwarting the "natural growth of the city. Sooner or later, there is absolutely no doubt a skyscraper will be built above the Terminal." Others were not so sure. A group of citizens, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and an older and wiser Philip Johnson, created a Committee to Save Grand Central. "If we don't care about our past," Onassis said, "we cannot hope for our future." In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the landmark status of Grand Central. It was a victory for preservationists across the nation. By the end of the century, the great terminal had been restored to its former grandeur.

While we should honor William J. Wilgus for the terminal's underground tracks and air rights and Whitney Warren for its Beaux-Arts façade and awe-inspiring concourse, we must credit the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the architect John Belle for a restoration of Grand Central that is sensitive, painstaking, and, above all, quiet. Down came the Kodak sign and *Newsweek* clock. Out went the ticker-tape machines and automobiles. Warren possessed an ego as great as the age in which he lived; Belle saw his job as preserver of a sacred space. Rather than impose a new order of his own, he was content to restore the order that once had been. This meant reconstructing passageways that had been obliterated in the name of commerce, and implementing Warren's plans fully. Belle has made Grand Central a grand, transcendent experience once again.

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