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Half-Life of a Zealot, by Swanee Hunt

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Born to a bigoted, reactionary oil billionaire, Swanee Hunt forged an altogether different legacy, composed of humanitarian philanthropy and international diplomacy. Along the way, she had to overcome daunting impediments. She was an illegitimate child in one of the two families that fabled oil billionaire H. L. Hunt maintained simultaneously. She was enlisted until late in her teens in Hunt's ultra-conservative activities. (One photograph in the book shows her as a "Goldwater Girl," holding a huge Goldwater For President sign [p. 124].) A rabid anticommunist, Hunt proposed Douglas MacArthur or Billy Graham for president. Asked about philanthropy, he fumed that Rockefeller and other plutocrats foundations were run by "people that are trying to destroy our nation" (p. 45).

Swanee Hunt's mother was an evangelical zealot, and Swanee herself was steeped in religious observances. As a teenager, she joined a Christian folk group and recruited African American children to vacation Bible school. Her life was also shadowed by personal trials. Mental illness ran in the family. A stepbrother was psychotic, and one of her daughters was afflicted with bipolar disease. She suffered a miscarriage and underwent therapy from time to time.

After years in a confining all-girls school, Hunt began to emerge into another world at Southern Methodist University. She met her first feminist professor and her future husband, head of a Christian Youth Group. Training to be a Southern Baptist minister, he opened her eyes to liberal thought. "I never completely abandoned my rural and religious roots," she recalls, "but I was delighted to escape what I perceived as the charm and charade of life as a steel magnolia, the familiar southern belle who drapes delicate manners over her immutable core" (p. 68).

When her husband took an assignment as pastor of a church in Heidelberg, she threw herself into the role of minister's wife, playing music for services and teaching Sunday school. Although they remained married for 15 years, each had romantic affairs with others. One of Hunt's most troubling was with a married psychiatrist, who later died of a drug overdose. At one point, she contemplated suicide herself.

After moving to Denver, she immersed in such philanthropic activities as the Clean Air Coalition and Amnesty International. Swanee and her husband ran a treatment center for the mentally ill and took refugees into their home. Hunt became increasingly class conscious. In one "immersion experience," she spent 24 hr in downtown Louisville with just \$1.

One of the recurring themes is her confrontation with the advantages and perils of wealth. Until well into their 30s, she and her sister Helen had little experience in finance or business. Their inheritance had been well managed by their brother, but in time, they fought with him for a larger share and won.

In her pastoral training in Dallas, Swanee had been warned against social gospel. Now, amid the ferment of Vietnam and Watergate, she confronted her wealth and wrestled with the idea of giving it all away and living a life of utmost simplicity. “Eventually I decided I was not that pure. Instead I would try to use my privilege for the poor” (p. 105). Her role as a social reformer expanded when she and her sister Helen created a foundation, the Hunt Alternatives Fund, whose giving was divided between her home, Denver, and Helen’s interests in New York and Dallas.

Women’s interests were one of Swanee’s major concerns. She started a Women’s Foundation and plunged into raising funds among wealthy Denver women. The fund took up the cause of the mentally ill, many of whom had been set adrift by Reagan-inspired policies of deinstitutionalization. Although the foundation was wracked by controversy over support of abortion rights, it built an endowment of \$10 million. Swanee was also active with the National Network of Women’s Funds, which had a rude awakening when women of color complained they had been excluded from the foundation’s efforts (p. 167).

Swanee is candid about failure and contradictions in running the foundation. One instance concerned an effort to distribute the contraceptive Norplant to poor women. The director of the fund labeled the program genocide. Swanee also wrestled with the charge by some social justice advocates that donors should not be allowed to hold board positions because they already wielded too much power in society.

Hunt sometimes sounds a bit too self-satisfied. She writes that her life has been more fulfilled than those of friends “who glide from one vacation into another. As they amuse themselves on an Alpine slope or African safari, they miss out on the greatest joy—knowing that they’ve made a solid difference in the lives of others” (p. 185). Yet, she has enjoyed outdoor adventures aplenty, trekking in Nepal, sailing on a yacht in Alaska, traveling through Europe, taking a trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, hiking in a Japanese park, to say nothing of horseback riding on a ranch she bought in the Rockies.

Hunt’s second marriage, to an orchestra conductor, was happy, and when they disagreed—on art for art’s sake—their difference was settled by creating a new program, Arts as a Vehicle for Social Change. Hunt was a serious musician, accomplished on the piano, dulcimer, and other instruments. She also composed a religious cantata, *Witness*, using texts of the New Testament and works by Elie Wiesel and great poets.

Hunt’s soul-searching did not dampen her ambition. Eager to win a place in the public sphere, she raised substantial funds for Bill Clinton and, welcomed into his inner circle, grew especially close to Hillary and the Gores. She lobbied hard to be named ambassador to Italy but failed. Receiving a phone call asking her whether she would be interested instead in Portugal, Switzerland, or Austria, she thought, “What was this? A bunch of guys in a basement, spinning a globe and playing point and purposes?” (p. 234). Nevertheless, she chose Austria. Candidly, Hunt notes that “money bought a seat at the table . . . but also shielded me from honest criticism.” So she was “mortified” when Common Cause, an organization that she had funded, labeled her appointment “a flagrant example of money wielding influence” (p. 248).

As ambassador, she performed ably, with her head start in knowledge of German. She navigated touchy situations, as when she aroused Jewish feelings by writing a column in a conservative Austrian newspaper that supported Kurt Waldheim. The Austrian president had been charged in the Western press with being guilty of war crimes. Hunt was cool toward him. “A repentant spirit could have made him a leader among Austrians coming to grips with their country’s Nazi past,” she writes. “But Waldheim, ever the consummate public official, provided no cathartic moment. . . . [He] failed to offer a convincing, heartfelt statement about living with a tortured conscience after having been part of a death machine” (p. 306).

Within the embassy, Hunt championed improvements in the status of gay and women staff members and grappled successfully with the CIA station chief. She extended her diplomatic energies to the conflict in the neighboring Balkans. Trying to persuade President Clinton to get involved in Bosnia, she hosted several international symposia to focus efforts on securing the peace. She also organized humanitarian projects, which have yielded books to restock the shelves of the destroyed National Library in Sarajevo, trees for parks denuded during the siege, and more than 6 tons of musical instruments for ravaged Bosnian schools. Her help for Bosnian women victims of the siege of Sarajevo are recounted in her earlier book, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace* (Duke University Press, 2004).

Hunt has written hundreds of articles in newspapers and academic journals. In this book, she is also an engaging raconteur of such tales as her computer being hacked in spy-ridden Vienna and her failure to raise a herd of bison. All in all, Hunt’s memoir provides insights into women’s philanthropy and international diplomacy.

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Michael Rushton

Cherbo, J. M., Stewart, R. A., & Wyszomirski, M. J. (Eds.). (2008). *Understanding the Arts and Creative Sector in the United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 224 pp., \$26.95.

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This volume contains 13 short chapters on various aspects of markets and policy in the arts and what have come to be known as the “creative industries.” Given the wide scope of the book, the chapters vary greatly in subject and tone, running from humanistic approaches to how the arts define who we are (Ellen Dissanayake on “The Universality of the Arts in Human Life”; Kevin Mulcahy on “Identity and Cultural Policy”) to arts policy at the local level (Maria Rosario Jackson on “Art and Cultural Participation at the Heart of Community Life”; Ruth Ann Stewart on “The Arts and Artist in Urban Revitalization”; Ann Galligan on “The Evolution of Arts and Cultural Districts”; Antoinette Lee on “Historic Preservation in the United States”) to the artistic and legal