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Roundtable Review 15-13

Frank Costigliola, *Kennan. A Life between Worlds*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. ISBN 9780691165400 (hardcover, \$ 39.95)

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 Introduction by Sarah-Jane Corke, The University of New Brunswick

As Fredrik Logevall noted in a review of this book, readers of this roundtable will be familiar with George Kennan's life and legacy.¹ I still remember the exact moment I encountered George Kennan. I was in high school, home sick from school, following my mother around the house in a state of such melancholy, that she did something extraordinary, and completely out of character. In a bid to rid herself of her shadow she told me to go downstairs to *her* library and select a book to read. Now this had never happened before, and I immediately knew the importance of the decision that lay in front me.

To this day I don't know what it was that led me to pick up George Kennan's memoirs, but I devoured that book in one sitting, and my love for the history of the Cold War/cold war began. It was on his last page that I found my path. Therein, Frank Costigliola's "flawed genius" (x) wrote:

Never before has there been such utter confusion in the public mind with respect to US foreign policy. The President doesn't understand it, nor does the public, nor does the press. They all wander around in labyrinth of ignorance and error and conjecture, in which truth is intermingled with fiction at a hundred points, in which unjustified assumptions have attained the validity of premises, and in which there is no recognized and authoritative theory to hold on to. *Only the diplomatic historian, working from the leisure and detachment of the later day, will be able to unravel this incredible tangle and to reveal the true aspect of the various factors and issues involved.* (emphasis added)²

Although my mother never knew it, her actions on that day changed the course of my life. You see, I never gave the book back.

It would also appear that I am not alone in falling under Kennan's spell, nor in remembering when I was first bewitched by him.³ Historian Michaela Hoenicke Moore was twenty when she first became "enchanted" with Kennan. For Hoenicke Moore, it was Kennan's "expansive, elegant writing" that drew her to the diplomat who "wandere[d] between worlds." For me, it was his ability to seemingly look both inside and out, as he navigated one of the greatest power struggles of my time. It was always the personal and the political for me. I just did not know it yet.

Although none of our male reviewers, David Milne, T. Christopher Jespersen, or Anders Stephanson, let us in on their first introduction to Kennan or why they found/find him so fascinating, Kennan also played a dominant role in their scholarly lives. Perhaps the most engaged is Stephanson, who authored one of the four biographies of Kennan to appear in the immediate post-Cold War era,⁴ and the only biography, Costigliola tells us, that Kennan liked (496). Stephanson confesses below that every year he still re-reads the Long

¹ Fredrick Logevall, "The Ghosts of Kennan: Lessons from the Start of a Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2023), 170-178, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/ghosts-george-kennan-lessons-cold-war>.

² George Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1967), 500.

³ Despite the footnote, I don't feel that my language is too overdrawn here, as Costigliola's subtitle "between two worlds" hints at something mystical.

⁴ Between 1988 and 1992 four monographs on Kennan appeared. In chronological order they are: David Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Walter Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Telegram and the X-Article often “finding new things in them.”⁵ He goes on to warn us, however, that we “should not fetishize these two canonical texts, however polyvalent they may be.”

In his remarks Stephanson presents several “disparate comments, questions and partial disagreements” to be pursued by readers after they finish Costigliola’s opus. He first queries whether Kennan ever seriously engaged with Sigmund Freud. In doing so he calls into question one of Costigliola’s central metaphors, which runs throughout the book and calls up a binary: that of Eros and Civilization, or order and creativity, which Costigliola argues dominated Kennan’s life (xix-xxx). Stephanson then goes on to explore Kennan’s ideological underpinnings and the contradiction between his “Burkean” conservatism, his “spontaneous realism,” his “romanticism,” and his seemingly contradictory disdain for theory. As he notes, “Kennan was attitudinally averse to abstraction and certainly ‘theory,’ but because of his powerfully analytical side he tended to move in a conceptual direction despite himself, so to speak.”

Discussions of Kennan’s “ideology” always cause me to reflect on the many strange asides that appeared in *Around the Cragged Hill*, which was subtitled *A Personal and Political Philosophy*.⁶ There Kennan argued that one of the problems with ideology is that there was no authoritative definition of the term. However, not one to let a little problem like this hold him back, Kennan went on to distinguish it from both religion and philosophy and added it could be defined “as a system of secular thought about contemporary political and social change on a level higher than just the national one, and capable of serving as a guide for public policy.” However, despite the definition he offered, he concluded that, if his definition was correct, then “it is safe to say that I have no ideology at all.”⁷

Kennan’s relationship with Walter Lippmann, his scholarly ability as an historian, the place of religion in his life, his understanding/misunderstanding of the Cold War, his failure to come to terms with the devastation of the Soviet Union after World War Two, and his relationship with, or, better, problem with intimacy, which Stephanson argues was “foundational” to him, all come under additional scrutiny. In this vein he also suggests that we need to explore, in much more detail, Kennan’s relationship to his wife, Annelise Sørensen. I could not agree more. It always strikes me as odd when the biographies of our great men avoid any discussion of the most important relationship in their lives, which of course is their life partner. But then most “popular” biographies are written about men, by men.⁸ This is true even for Kennan; however, his disdain for both his wife, and, indeed for woman in general, is now better understood, thanks in large part to Costigliola’s work (15, 18-20, 23, 87, 90-91, 239).

Most notably, however, Stephanson also chides Costigliola for not engaging, in any substantive way, with the historiography, although he does not fault him for this given the length of the book and the audience it was designed for. Yet, Kennan’s legacy has yet to be fully explored in a substantive historiographical essay. It would be a daunting task, given the hundreds of books and articles written on him.⁹ But it is needed, and

⁵ Although only encompassing a short part of Stephanson argument (point #13), his “Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept on the Cold War,” is also useful on for understanding Kennan. See Anders Stephanson, “Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War,” H-Diplo Essays, <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/stephanson-14notes.pdf>.

⁶ Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (New York: W.W. & Norton, 1993).

⁷ Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill*, 96-97.

⁸ Andrew Kahn and Rebecca Onion, “Is History Written by About Men, by Men?” *Slate Magazine*, January 6, 2016. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2016/01/popular_history_why_are_so_many_history_books_about_men_by_men.html.

⁹ I cannot list them all, but a good place to start in exploring the literature is Laurel F. Franklin, ed., *George F. Kennan: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Westport: 1997).

Costigliola's discussion of Kennan's thoughts on his biographers should provide fertile ground for a more systematic discussion (431-440, 493-507).

It is also important to mention that while Costigliola and John Lewis Gaddis have written the now foundational texts on Kennan, other scholars, too numerous to mention here, have forged important paths that need to be recognized.¹⁰ In this vein, I would have appreciated a discussion of which authors had the most impact on Costigliola's thinking as he wrote this book. In his response, Costigliola elaborates on each of the issues raised by Stephanson, except the point about historiography, perhaps because his scholarship as a whole has focused more on debates about methodology or theory than on historiography.¹¹

Reviewer David Milne has authored several chapters on Kennan.¹² It is worth noting that in his well-regarded intellectual history, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy*, Milne characterizes Kennan as "the artist" and Paul Nitze, Kennan's sometimes nemesis, as "the scientist."¹³ While Kennan and Nitze are only two of nine important American foreign policy thinkers he investigates, they embody the binary between art and science evident in his overall methodology. In his review of Costigliola's book, Milne again employs a binary of sorts by contrasting Costigliola's work with that of Kennan's official biographer, John Lewis Gaddis.¹⁴ He notes that while Gaddis is Kennan's political biographer, Costigliola is his personal one. To his mind, while Costigliola's work "is not quite the reverse of Gaddis's book...it does attend closely and sympathetically to the aspects of Kennan's life that Kennan feared Gaddis's biography would neglect." He concludes one must "read Gaddis's biography to understand why Kennan matters...and read Costigliola to understand what made him tick."

Costigliola disagrees. He also picks up on Milne's use of "polarities" in his rebuttal, but he goes on to argue that "by reducing complexity to easily graspable difference, we can lose sight of the subtlety and even the substance of an issue. Moreover, once we have erected our structure of opposing categories, it is tempting to squeeze our analysis into it, even if it impoverishes understanding." As he writes in the book, "personal and political borders" often blurred (245). In his response, he points out all the places where a more nuanced understanding of Kennan is called for, and the ways in which his book and Gaddis's parallel each other. He is correct. But scholars should read both books. Appearing a little over ten years apart, the two will be forever paired; and despite their combined length, with 1,458 words between them, this is a truly wonderful thing.

¹⁰ Among many, many others, see, Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy*; Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*; and Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy*.

¹¹ See his essays in volumes two and three of Michael J. Hogan and Frank Costigliola, *Explaining the History of US Foreign Relations*. See Costigliola, "Reading for Emotion," in Hogan and Costigliola, *Explaining the History of US Foreign Relations*, 3rd edition (London: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 354-374; and Costigliola, "Reading for Meaning: Theory, Language and Metaphor," in Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of US Foreign Relations*, 2nd edition, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 279-303. I would also make the argument that the second edition of *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations*, moved away from containing historiographical essays (which the first volume did extraordinarily well) to conflating historiography and methodology. See Hogan, *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 1st edition, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Costigliola and Hogan, *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, (London, Cambridge University Press, 2013). Both books are now ten years out of date. Hopefully, sequels are in being planned as they are both indispensable to the field.

¹² David Milne, "The Artist: George Kennan," in *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015): 217-267; Milne, "The Kennan Diaries," in Scott Lucas and Bevan Sewell, eds., *Challenging US Foreign Policy: America and the World in the Long Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 56-74.

¹³ For perhaps the most in-depth coverage of the relationship between the two men see Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan and the History of the Cold War*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009)

¹⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: Penguin, 2012).

For his part, T. Christopher Jespersen has also systematically engaged with Costigliola's subject in an edited collection titled *Interviews with George Kennan*.¹⁵ In his review, he acknowledges the power that Kennan still has in contemporary debates over American foreign policy, but he also recognizes his dramatic personal failings, highlighting "Kennan the apprehensive, Kennan the physically sick, Kennan the tortured soul. Kennan with a wandering eye, [and] Kennan the philanderer..."¹⁶ As he notes, this intersection all came to head "when Kennan, on 19 September 1952, while traveling from Moscow to London, at a stopover in Berlin, responded to a reporter's question and compared Moscow and the isolation he suffered, to war-time Berlin, and in so doing, compared Soviet Russia with Nazi Germany, something he had drilled into his staff never to do, and something the Kremlin found completely unacceptable, beyond the diplomatic pale, and so declared him *persona non grata*." It is then not so easy to separate the personal and the professional, in Jespersen's terms, when trying to come to terms with Kennan.

According to Jespersen, Costigliola's portrait is "sympathetic without absolving Kennan of his sins," which he notes are profound, referring to him as "a racist, a homophobe, and a xenophobe." This tracks well with Milne's conclusions that Kennan also exhibited "antisemitism, snobbery and philandering." But it was more than that. He was also a misogynist, as Hoenicke Moore points out in her review. In her words, Kennan was "endlessly self-pitying, self-absorbed, bigoted, arrogant, misanthropic (I use the term to include misogynist), and anti-democratic-elitist." For his part, Costigliola too calls Kennan a "misogynist," but he adds that it was more *sui generis* reflecting painful experiences in his childhood, his subsequently sex proclivities, and prevailing American attitudes about woman and the home" (206).

These are most likely not the characterizations that Kennan wanted to be remembered by when he carefully curated his archive at the Mudd Library in Princeton University. The thousands of documents, in hundreds of boxes, were all carefully selected, organized, considered, and reconsidered over the years as scholars began their research into Kennan. And for years, one could not photocopy any of the documents. Instead, you were allowed to take notes. There was an important reason why this was the procedure historians were forced to follow while Kennan was alive. If he did not like what you wrote, he was known to remove the evidence. Costigliola discusses the case of C. Ben Wright, who was completing his doctoral dissertation on Kennan while attending the University of Wisconsin, which was then viewed as a hotbed of revisionism (432-437, 497).¹⁷

It appears that these "ego-documents," to quote Hoenicke Moore, have served an important role in Kennan historiography. As she notes, by relying on them, Costigliola's "great accomplishment [is] to lay out his protagonist's thoughts, feelings, and behavior to show how they shaped Kennan's thinking on international affairs and evolving policy positions." But they have also served to fundamentally change the traditional

¹⁵ T. Christopher Jespersen, ed., *Interviews with George F. Kennan* (Oxford, University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

¹⁶ After just completing an article review of David Mayers' wonderful essay on Agnes Smedley, in which I queried the gendered constructions of women's emotions and the way in which scholars have highlighted their mental and physical ailments to illustrate their supposed weakness, here I must also point out that despite Kennan's mental and physical ailments, he continues to be linked to the masculine project (XIX, 185, 195). See David Mayers, "Freelance Revolutionist: Agnes Smedley in Wartime China, 1937-1941," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 33: 2 (2022): 233-256, and H-Diplo Article Review 1184: Corke on Mayers, "Freelance Revolutionist," 21 June 2023. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/12874964/h-diplo-article-review-1184-corke-mayers-freelance-revolutionist>.

¹⁷ When conducting my own research on John Paton Davies at the Truman Library I came across a letter from Kennan to Davies which talked about being approached by a 'very annoying' young historian, by the name of Bruce Cummings, who was interested in Kennan's role in early American covert operations. In the letter Kennan instructed Davies to both avoid Cummings and destroy his [Kennan's] letter. Davies, for reasons that remain unclear kept the letter. One has to wonder how many compromising documents were destroyed over the years. George Kennan to John Paton Davies, (Date unknown) Harry S. Truman Library, John Paton Davies Papers, Box, 4 File George F. Kennan.

understanding of the once “great man.” Costigliola argues that Kennan should still be viewed as “an unsung hero for his efforts to ease the Cold War” (xv, 3); whether the next generation of scholars will see him in the same way is uncertain. For Hoenicke Moore, Kennan is now obscured by an ego so large that it is hard to see past his “hubris, arrogance, lack of self-control, and unshakable sense of superiority.” Women scholars are much harder on Kennan than the men. And there are good reasons for that.

Given what we know now about both Kennan’s personality, and his *weltanschauung*, I must confess he no longer holds the same place of prominence in my life that he once did. I now treasure his *Memoirs* less for what he wrote and more for the small marginal comments made by my mother and my uncle, with whom who my mom once shared the book. This move away from Kennan goes back to my undergraduate years, when I had the opportunity to work with John Melby, the primary author of the *China Paper*.¹⁸ Melby also worked with Kennan and Moscow, and he was the first to tell me of Kennan’s snobbery and sometimes callousness to those who worked under him. My suspicions about Kennan again resurfaced after I reviewed *Around the Cragged Hill*.¹⁹ It further solidified as I went through his papers at the Mudd Library.

What remains compelling, and why I will encourage my graduate students to read *Kennan: A Life Between Worlds*, is Costigliola’s methodology: the tension he created between George the man and Kennan the political sage. I am intrigued, as I have been in all of Costigliola’s recent work, by his determination to access one of the most difficult subjects an historian can: the personal.²⁰ And, perhaps more importantly, I am challenged by his gifted ability to illustrate how the personal affected the political. Costigliola negotiates this relationship exceptionally well in this book.

Contributors:

Frank Costigliola, a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Connecticut, is the author or editor of seven books. He is a past president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) and a recipient of SHAFR’s Norman and Laura Graebner Lifetime Achievement Award. He is entering his 52nd year as a professor. Costigliola is writing a biography of Walter LaFeber and would appreciate hearing from anyone with correspondence from, or stories about, Walt.

Sarah-Jane Corke is the co-founder and past-president of the North American Society for Intelligence History (NASIH). She is an associate professor of history at the University of New Brunswick. Her first book *US Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, the CIA and Secret Warfare* was published by Routledge in 2008. Her second book, an edited collection with Mark Stout, *Adventures in Intelligence History: Stories from The International Spy Museum and Beyond*, is under contract and due to be published in 2024 by the University Press of Kansas. Her third monograph, *The Nine Lives of Patricia and John Paton Davies*, was awarded a Social Sciences

¹⁸ John Melby, *Conversation with Sarah-Jane Corke*, University of Guelph, 1987.

¹⁹ Sarah-Jane Corke, “Review of George F. Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy*,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 13:3 (1993): 96-97.

²⁰ In chronological order see: Costigliola, “‘I React Intensely to Everything’: Russia and the Frustrated Emotions of George F. Kennan, 1933-1958,” *Journal of American History* 103:4 (March 2016): 1075-1106; Costigliola, “Pamela Churchill, Wartime London and the Making of the Special Relationship,” *Diplomatic History*, 36:4 (September 2012): 753-762; Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012); Costigliola, “After Roosevelt’s Death: Dangerous Emotions, Divisive Discourses and Abandoned Alliance,” *Diplomatic History* 34:1 (Diplomatic History): 1-23; Costigliola, “Broken Circle: The Isolation of Franklin D. Roosevelt I World War II,” *Diplomatic History* 32: 5 (November 2008): 677-718; and Costigliola, “The ‘Invisible Wall’: Personal and Cultural Origins of the Cold War,” *New England Journal of History* 64:1 (Fall 2007): 190-213.

and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant in 2022. She is also working on an edited collection with Stephen Long on *Western Covert Operations Against the Eastern Bloc*, and a history of the Director of National Intelligence with Michael Miner.

Michaela Hoenicke Moore is Associate Professor of History at the University of Iowa where she teaches US foreign policy and the histories of Europe and the US in the 20th century. She is the author of *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-45* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which won the Myrna Bernath Book Prize of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Her current book project, *The Varieties of Patriotism: Americans Debate Their Country's Role in the World from the 'Good War' to Vietnam*, is a study of foreign policy views at the grassroots level.

T. Christopher Jespersen is the author of *American Images of China, 1931-1949* (Stanford University Press, 1996) and editor of *Interviews with George F. Kennan* (University Press of Kentucky, 2002). He is the Dean of the College of Arts & Letters at the University of North Georgia.

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Anders Stephanson is the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Family Foundation Professor of History at Columbia University. Relevant publications here include his *George F. Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Harvard University Press, 1989). Currently, he is collecting and slightly revising his scattered writings on the “Cold War” as a periodizing concept. He thinks that problem remains critical for the subfield.

 Review by Michaela Hoenicke Moore, University of Iowa

It is difficult to imagine a historian better equipped to write a biography of George F. Kennan, the one-time Cold War grand strategist turned perennial critic, than Frank Costigliola, who is one of the leading scholars in the field of US foreign relations, an elegant writer who grounds his analysis consistently in the widest possible range of sources available. He successfully pioneered a methodology of close reading that brings alive the relevance of emotions to foreign affairs and is thus well positioned to describe and analyze a man who regarded himself as intensely emotional, prided himself on his sensitivities and intuitions, and kept extensive personal diaries for nearly nine decades.¹ In addition to several journal articles on Kennan that apply the method of reading for emotions, Costigliola edited Kennan's diaries.² The book under review showcases all of Costigliola's talents, skills, and mastery.

Costigliola's portrait of Kennan is nuanced, balanced, and empathetic. He depicts "the flawed genius" (x) as "a tortured, talented, and ultimately tragic individual who helped instigate the Cold War and then worked unceasingly to end it" (25), who offered a much needed "old-fashioned sense of limits about America's role in the world, faith in diplomacy, prescience about the future, and appreciation of Moscow's dilemmas" (523), and whose deeply felt concern about nuclear weapons, the environment, and overreliance on machines speaks to our current time, in spite of his difficult personality and prejudices (539). One might add, beyond the confines of a biography, that many contemporary individuals, including diplomats, movements, and organizations, took on these same issues, some to greater effect.

In the penultimate chapter of this superb biography, the author includes an instructive reflection on Kennan's hopes for and anxieties about his biographers—past, future, authorized and unauthorized. (493-507).³ We learn how forcefully Kennan sought to shape history's memory of himself. In the final chapter, Costigliola discusses obituaries and tributes by policy makers, historians, admirers, and critics who knew him well and sharply diverged in their assessments (524-32). Even two recent pieces on the biography under review illustrate how Kennan continues to serve as a screen onto which readers, foreign policy scholars, and interested audiences project their own desires, understanding, and current policy preferences.⁴ Kennan's inability to control his image, to set the record straight as he understood it, mirrors his "failure" as he saw it, to influence and guide American foreign policy (414, 467, 474, 513, 529).

Kennan is a towering figure in the field of diplomatic history. As a twenty-year-old, sitting in the grass in front of the big lecture hall on the Cologne university campus, I first encountered the famous fairies that Kennan perceived as a child in the park near his family home and was entirely enchanted.⁵ The great man offered the whole range of what many of us were looking for and aspired to. Recently returned from Science Po in Paris, I especially appreciated his expansive, elegant writing—as common for French statesmen and diplomats as it was rare for American ones. He was not only a diplomatic historian whose books had won scholarly and literary awards, he was the real thing: a diplomat, a wanderer between worlds (as so many of us

¹ Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

² Costigliola, ed., *The Kennan Diaries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

³ Among these, two deserve special mention: Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), and the authorized biography by John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan. An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

⁴ Anatol Lieven, "Kennan: A Life Between Worlds—Lessons for the Containment of Russia," *Financial Times*, 16 March 2023, <https://on.ft.com/3zuGkM4>, and Janan Ganesh, "Where Did All the Reactionaries Go?" *Financial Times*, 31 March 2023, <https://on.ft.com/3K98D7n>.

⁵ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 4f.

were and are), one who was not entirely at home here or there. Most significantly, he had achieved that rare feat of being a foreign policy intellectual while serving as a foreign policy maker.

A few years later I was distraught to realize that I could not integrate some of his pertinent writing into my dissertation because, as I slowly began to grasp, the great man understood neither the Third Reich, where he was stationed, nor the policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he served (170, 198, 259f.) That was disappointing, but not yet devastating. Over the decades I heard older graduate students, teachers, and colleagues, including my mentor Michael H. Hunt, critique Kennan for his relentless re-positioning, self-justification, and one-upmanship (on Hunt's 1978 challenge: 440f.).⁶ They clearly had read more and more carefully than I had. For me, Kennan faded into a misty Mount Rushmore distance, from which he emerged only periodically when he intervened in public debates on the—from my perspective—"correct" side against NATO expansion in the 1990s and against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. I could have picked up other cues, for example from the Master's thesis of one of my graduate students, a young Japanese diplomat who wrote about Kennan's and émigré political scientist Hans Morgenthau's critiques of the Vietnam War and found that Morgenthau's public commentaries had more substance, prescience, and clear-sightedness than that of his fellow-realist diplomat.⁷

Colleagues who read Kennan's diaries, once they became available through Costigliola's expert editorial efforts, began so see the diplomat as endlessly self-pitying, self-absorbed, bigoted, arrogant, misanthropic (I use the term to include misogynist), and anti-democratic-elitist.⁸ This raises the question: are these so-called ego-documents (personal diaries, letters, memoirs) a distraction that unnecessarily clouds our perspective on the subject? That is not how Kennan saw it when he granted his authorized biographer John Lewis Gaddis complete access to the diaries. What then do emotional dispositions have to do with foreign affairs? A lot, as Kennan believed, and as Costigliola demonstrates (265). This biographer's great accomplishment is to lay out his protagonist's thoughts, feelings, and behavior to show how they shaped Kennan's thinking on international affairs and evolving policy positions.

At the center of much discussion about Kennan is what Costigliola calls Kennan's "tragedy" and what the protagonist himself considered his greatest "failure," namely to have been praised as the foremost American Cold War grand strategist, only to be politely ignored as a critic of that militarized conflict. Costigliola generously offers that Kennan's failure to be heard "says much about the political culture and emotional sensibility of America."³ That might be true, but digging more deeply into Kennan's political career, this account uncovers a less flattering explanation.

The diplomat, Russian expert, ambassador, and historian was judged by his peers and superiors as not entirely reliable and trustworthy in his political judgment, analysis, and behavior (e.g., 342-51, 402-06, 530f). There were the diplomat's frequent physical and mental breakdowns that are noted throughout the book and which characterized each chapter of his life. There were gaffes like the one in the final segment of the 1957 BBC Reith Lectures when Kennan proposed that paramilitary forces in Western Europe could "effectively deter Soviet aggression" making large scale armies unnecessary (398), or the diplomatic faux pas that got him expelled from the Soviet Union after a rather short tenure as US ambassador (365-367). The respective

⁶ Michael H. Hunt and John W. Coogan, "Kennan and Containment: A Comment," *Passport: Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter* (March 1978), 23-25.

⁷ For comparative context see Vibeke Schou Tjalve's exquisite *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and the Politics of Patriotic Dissent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁸ David Greenberg, "The Misanthropy Diaries. Containment, Democracy, and the Prejudices of George Frost Kennan," in Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston, *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 254-271.

chapter, quoting Kennan's assessment of himself, "Chosen Instrument," is more broadly illustrative of how hubris, arrogance, lack of self-control, and unshakable sense of superiority brought him to fall. Costigliola notes a similar challenge in Kennan's second ambassadorship to Yugoslavia under President John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s: "vanity" and "pride complicated diplomatic issues" (419).

Fredrik Logevall raises a related question: what motivated Kennan in taking first one and then another contrarian position on the Cold War?⁹ With regard to the two foundational texts, the 1946 Long Telegram and the 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article signed X, Costigliola argues that Kennan's "search for a usable crisis, even catastrophe, that could mobilize America's too diffuse energies would become one of his motivations for depicting the Soviet Union as an existential threat" (263).¹⁰ More importantly, the Long Telegram was a successful job application: a year later Kennan became the inaugural director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff (284-292).

Kennan's long trail of subsequent writings, trying to amend his previous ones which had been misunderstood as he argued, are insightful and resonate with many for their anti-imperial, anti-militarization bend. But, again, such critiques were also available, even contemporaneously, from other sources. Kennan's motivation for writing now increasingly corrective and contrary analyses, criticizing what he had helped usher in, remained the same as in the first instance: to make himself relevant to the conduct of American foreign policy (436-438). In and out of office he considered himself to be the best man to deal with the Kremlin and the evolving situation in Europe, because he knew Russia more deeply than anyone else.¹¹

What is "at stake here," as Costigliola notes, is "Kennan's credibility as a serious critic of US foreign policy" (531). The balance sheet is more ambiguous than this empathetic biographer "of the unsung hero of the Cold War" makes out (3). For colleagues, presidents, family members, and friends, initial "awe dimmed into ambivalence" upon closer contact with Kennan. Economic adviser Owen T. Jones noted in his diary in 1961 and 1962, "I am repelled by [Kennan's] self-centered egoism, 'his mercurial moods, his intellectual arrogance' [and] 'the unevenness of his performance.'" (420f., cf. also 157). Paul Nitze, "personal friend and later policy rival," remembered that Kennan "certainly wouldn't listen to any criticism of any kind" (303). Dorothy Fosdick, the only woman on the State Department's Policy Planning Staff under Kennan and long thereafter, recalled Kennan's "strong messianic streak. I always felt that he thought he should have been Secretary of State." Mary Acheson Bundy, a Princeton friend and daughter of his former boss, commented on "George's very sensitive and fragile temperament" and offered: "He collapsed a lot." (21, also xvi). His oldest daughter, Grace Warnecke Kennan, recalls her father's fits of anger "like a searing white heat that scorched everything in its path" turning him "into a petulant, irrational man with whom one could not

⁹ Fredrick Logevall, "The Ghosts of Kennan: Lessons from the Start of a Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2023), 170-178, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/ghosts-george-kennan-lessons-cold-war>.

¹⁰ These two purportedly rational analyses with policy guidance offered a pathologizing portrait of the enemy in gendered language that veered between florid and lurid. Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology and Emotion in George F. Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History* 83:4 (March 1997), 1309-1339, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952904>

¹¹ The parallels between Kennan and Vice President Henry A. Wallace—two men who could not have been more contrary in their ideologies, politics, and personalities—are striking. Both believed, and lobbied superiors and presidents based on this belief, that only *they* understood Stalin, the Soviet Union, the Russian people, and that only *they* could negotiate an effective and satisfying deal with the Kremlin. Both were misled by a faith in their innate superior understanding that allowed them to see what others could not. Both had a messianic streak that neither served their political careers nor their country. See the forthcoming political biography of Wallace by Council on Foreign Relations economic historian Benn Steil who offers a fresh, evidence-based portrait of the former standard bearer for the American anti-Cold War liberal Left: *The World That Wasn't: Henry Wallace and the Trials of American Globalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, forthcoming 2024).

argue...”(517). British Under Secretary of State David K. Bruce judged Kennan as ““far too emotional and egocentric””(358). Costigliola, tracking this extraordinarily long career step by step, adds that Kennan’s ““impressive talents were exceeded only by his ambitions”” (21).

A deeper problem than personality was Kennan’s much vaunted “intuition.” Too often it was a case of mistaken identity, of projection. This is my word choice. Costigliola speaks of “empathy” (26, 116, 128, 165, 190, 435) and compares Kennan’s strong emotional reactions to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s purges and isolation of foreigners to that of a “jealous lover” (8, regarding the US he is “a spurned lover,” 514). In either case, the biography highlights a continuous practice and specific historical moments in which Kennan conflated his own persona, crises, or grievances with world historical figures and events (93, 111, 122, 151, 159f., 166f., 176, 279, 298, 339, 355, 431). This self-referential understanding of other countries, peoples, and cultures characterized first his view of Germany, then of Russia, reached a crescendo during his tenure as American ambassador in Moscow, and did not abate in later decades.

Kennan’s two major areas of expertise and to some extent passion—the German nation and the Russian empire and its people—illustrate the problem of projection, as Costigliola’s several chapters on Kennan’s extended and repeated stays in both places show. Kennan knew, spoke, and read both languages like a native and studied Russian and the Soviet Union from his perch in Berlin (391). Yet, he often showed himself neither particularly prescient nor perceptive and instead clouded by his own feelings, prejudices, and preferences. As Costigliola notes, Kennan’s “sympathy bent toward elites and the tradition” (165f). The diplomat identified with German aristocracy and Russian elites (189f, 193), sympathized with Austrian fascism, and showed little concern for ordinary people in either of those countries or at home (127, 170f., 214, 218ff, 221-228, 373). As a result, Kennan was not able to form an understanding of the Third Reich as clear-sighted and accurate as that of his colleagues and superiors, men of his time, class, and background—a formulation sometimes used to explain away Kennan’s antisemitism (77-83, 224-34, Kennan’s own retrospective defense does not hold water either: (473f).¹²

Kennan’s self-referential understanding of world events persisted through the end. When the Cold War ended in 1989-1991, triggered by peaceful revolutions across Eastern Europe, Kennan berated “these young people who fled from Eastern Germany” because “[t]hey are under nobody’s control” (491). He found the situation ““from the standpoint of American policy essentially out of control”” (485).¹³ Specifically, these people did not follow the careful plan of disengagement that Kennan had laid out forty years ago and propagated ever since (cf. also his misjudgment of the Helsinki Accords, 455). Similarly jarring is his 1990 “empathetic” commentary on the challenges facing the last Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev’s Russia which the former diplomat relates to his own fate as “a motherless child”—originally a trauma, in his late eighties more of a trope that is ever present in this biography (487).

In line with his overall judicious and appreciative assessment of Kennan’s accomplishments, Costigliola summarizes:

¹² On American officials’ understanding of the Third Reich, see Michaela Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazi Germany, 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On Kennan’s connection with Helmuth James Count von Moltke (228), see Helmuth James von Moltke, *Letters to Freya, 1939-1945* (New York: Vintage, 1995). Moltke, who was the same age, and had the same good looks, and a similar government position, was the very opposite of Kennan: namely a man of conscience, a democrat, a human being with deep love for his family, his country, and ordinary people.

¹³ On this point see Penny Von Eschen, *Paradoxes of Nostalgia: Cold War Triumphalism and Global Disorder since 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

Unlike virtually every other leader present and active in the creation of the Cold War, Kennan worked hard to reverse course. While he had spent the four years from 1944 to 1948 promoting the Cold War, he devoted the subsequent forty to undoing what he and others had wrought. That's not a bad record (425).

I agree—and would add regarding the absence of intellectual honesty his inability to reflect on and acknowledge his own misjudgments, Kennan was less of an outsider in the foreign policy establishment than he and others thought.

Review by T. Christopher Jespersen, University of North Georgia

In 1952, George Kennan was appointed the US ambassador to the Soviet Union. Coming at the end of the Truman administration, which had enthusiastically adopted his strategy of containment, this should have been the highlight of his career. Instead, it marked his downfall from government service, as the Kremlin shortly thereafter marked him *persona non grata*, and Kennan had to leave and then retire from diplomatic service when the new secretary of state for the Eisenhower administration, John Foster Dulles, refused to find a post for him. In short, it was not of his own doing, and for nearly anyone else, it would have marked the ignominious end of a remarkable career to that point.

And yet, seven decades later, George F. Kennan persists. Long after his lengthy life, nearly two decades after his death, Kennan continues to loom large over American diplomacy. Russian president Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022 is yet another example of how Kennan remains relevant well into the twenty-first century. He could have predicted Putin's response to NATO's expansion. Indeed, he practically did. Kennan, in short, could have explained Putin's thinking, and would have been happy to do have done so to policymakers who were willing to lend an ear.

The portrait Frank Costigliola paints, in this exhaustively researched biography, is of a driven, introspective, anxious, and highly complex individual, one who was afflicted by both his insecurities and his yearnings. Kennan the apprehensive, Kennan the physically sick, Kennan the tortured soul. Kennan with a wandering eye, Kennan the philanderer. Kennan the emotionally distraught over the direction of the Soviet Union. Kennan the deluded thinker when it came to the Russian people and the Soviet leadership. It is all here, and then some, and it is beautifully told.

Kennan is, of course, defined by the Long Telegram and then the Truman Doctrine and the Mr. X article, which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947.¹ Secretary of State Dean Acheson may have been present at the creation, according to the title of his memoir, but Kennan was one of the creators. And that creation haunted Kennan for the remainder of his life, as Costigliola shows.²

Kennan the diplomat was also Kennan the farmer. On this point, Costigliola is supremely qualified to offer an assessment, having, later in his own life, become a dairy cattle farmer. Costigliola is also somewhat (I offer tongue in cheek) qualified as a diplomatic historian to tackle Kennan's life as diplomat and academic. In *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, Costigliola wove together the complicated personal and professional lives of the myriad diplomats and policymakers of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in its diplomatic dealings with the USSR during World War Two.³ It was a fascinating, gossipy, and compelling argument. In his biography of Kennan, Costigliola brings his considerable skills to account for George Kennan.⁴

Costigliola states that the Cold War was going to develop with or without George Kennan. How true. But as he so carefully demonstrates, the way in which the Cold War came about was most assuredly affected by what Kennan thought, how he perceived developments, and, most importantly, by what he wrote and how his words affected others in policymaking circles. Sometimes Kennan was simply stating what others already

¹ X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), 566-582.

² Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969).

³ Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁴ See also, T. Christopher Jespersen, ed., *Interviews with George F. Kennan* (Oxford, University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

believed; other times, he was shaping the discourse, especially in how the Truman administration sought to influence public opinion.

Having made his mark in 1946-1947, Kennan would have been the most qualified of individuals to assume an ambassadorship, especially to the Soviet Union in 1952. As Costigliola notes, when he was appointed and returned to the land of his professional youth, Kennan sought to ease the Soviet “pathological fear of the individual foreigner” (331). That is something relevant today, what with *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich being held as a prisoner and accused of espionage. Then there is US basketball player Britney Griner’s imprisonment, as well as others, including Paul Whelan, who remain accused and detained.

Throughout his life, Kennan longed for the 1930s—before the purges—when Americans and Russians could go together to dinner or the theater; Costigliola notes that “this mixing between Americans and Russians—so dear to Kennan’s heart—had gone on without ‘much of a hullabaloo’—meaning without repression from either McCarthyites or Moscow” (331). He continues, “in longing for that lost world, Kennan made a leap of faith, and tragically set himself up for a fall.” Here Kennan tried backtracking from some of what he argued in the long telegram and the X article, insisting that Soviet leaders “remained highly rational and hence cautious” (331).

Kennan continued to be at odds with many policymakers in Washington, as he wanted to negotiate with the Russians, and they did not. He had something of a falling out with his friend Chip Bolen in the State Department after meeting with Dean Acheson and getting nowhere. Bohlen noted how strident Kennan’s “bitterness against the Govt in general and the State Dept (& the Sec)” was getting (335). Kennan was thus truly between worlds, as Costigliola notes. Neither of Moscow nor of Washington, he struggled to find his place, and he continually longed for the Soviet Union he experienced as a young diplomat in the mid-1930s.

Despite having helped instigate the American response that led to the Cold War, Kennan remained optimistic. Or, as Costigliola puts it, he possessed a “mystical optimism” that he might be able to leverage his understanding, language skills, love for Russia, and experience into starting the process of altering the direction of the Cold War” (340). That didn’t happen, at least not immediately. Kennan’s downfall in 1952–1953 stemmed from his frustration over anti-US propaganda in the waning days of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. As Costigliola notes, “Despite his determination to remain unemotional, Kennan immediately became offended by the grotesque anti-American propaganda visible in newspapers and on the streets of Moscow” (342). Kennan reacted emotionally: “A long cable to the State Department expressed his hurt and fury at the ‘viciousness, shamelessness, mendacity, and intensity’ of the campaign” (342). Five years after his X article in *Foreign Affairs*, Kennan was right back where he started in assessing Soviet behavior. As Costigliola recounts it, Kennan’s reaction was “touching deep sources of genuine fury and resentment” and accusing people of “pathological habits of mind...too quick to suspicion and false conclusions of every kind” (344). He quickly took to calling the Soviet Union a “semi-oriental country,” as he had in his X article (344).

Kennan continued to long for the days before the purges. As Costigliola notes, Kennan wrote dialogue for Stalin. “In channeling ‘Papa,’ Kennan revealed his longing for Moscow-in-1934. Back then, his mastery of the language and culture and his status as the namesake of the elder George Kennan (1845-1924) had won respect from Soviet officials and a welcome from influential artists and writers” (349).

The problem was that in 1952, Kennan’s yearnings for a Soviet Union that no longer existed alienated him from other diplomats. Even more, “the June missive and similar emotional expressions also undercut Kennan’s standing among foreign diplomats” (350).

It all came to a head when Kennan, on 19 September 1952, while traveling from Moscow to London, at a stopover in Berlin, responded to a reporter’s question and compared Moscow and the isolation he suffered,

to war-time Berlin, and in so doing, compared Soviet Russia with Nazi Germany, something he had drilled into his staff never to do, and something the Kremlin found completely unacceptable, beyond the diplomatic pale, and so declared him *persona non grata*. Costigliola tallies the cost: “Kennan had crashed not only his ambassadorship in Moscow but also his standing as the US government’s most respected expert on Russia” (367). In typical Kennan fashion, he later portrayed the entire incident as some kind of love triangle with the Soviet people representing the attractive damsel and the Kremlin as the brutish boyfriend determined to prevent anyone else from getting near her (369).

Kennan left government, not of his own accord, but because, as noted, the new secretary of state for the Eisenhower administration, John Foster Dulles, refused to find a post for him, and per State Department protocol, after six months, Kennan had to retire. He landed at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, took to his new position with decidedly mixed feelings, but produced a book, and was then invited to give a series of lectures at Oxford University in 1957. In addition, the BBC asked Kennan to give the Reith Lectures that same year, so off to England it was for Kennan and his family. Amidst what would seem to be a plum academic opportunity, Costigliola takes us behind the scenes by bringing to light Kennan’s living conditions. Gone was the spacious Princeton home. Instead, Kennan found himself writing, that is dictating his thoughts to the secretaries he had to pay for himself, in the same room where the family ate. Kennan also had to walk down two flights of stairs to get the coal to heat the apartment and then travel those same two flights to take out the ashes. So much for the romantic academic life.

Just the same, the Oxford and Reith lectures were a tremendous success. Kennan drew considerable attention for his positions on nuclear weapons and Germany, raising the ire of West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who wrote to President Dwight Eisenhower to complain about how Kennan’s arguments were emboldening his political opposition. Eisenhower dismissed Kennan as a “‘headline-seeker,’” but it was clear that Kennan still possessed a powerful, and potentially influential, voice. As Costigliola writes, “what gave such emotional force to Kennan’s lectures was not just what he said but how he said it” (400).

Although sympathetic to Kennan, Costigliola can be, and often is, unsparing in his criticism. His words are worth quoting at length. In regard to the containment doctrine and Kennan’s subsequent misgivings about the way it was applied, Costigliola notes,

Missing from this catalog of sorrow and regret was his own responsibility for having helped ignite the Cold War with his incendiary rhetoric in the Long Telegram and in the Mr. ‘X’ article. Determined to gain a hearing and to advance his career, he had exaggerated the threat posed by the Soviet Union as a geopolitical and ideological rival. Though he knew that Russia, devastated by war, remained cautious, he deployed his rhetorical brilliance to cast the Kremlin as an aggressive, existential threat to America, Western Europe, and everything decent. Kennan had specified that he favored containing the Soviet Union primarily through political, economic, and psychological measures rather than military ones. Nevertheless, the force of Kennan’s rhetoric, the tendency of leaders to ‘play it safe,’ and the fact that the United States had just deployed massive military force to win a smashing victory in a total war all led political and military chiefs to turn to weapons of force, especially the atomic bomb, to deter a Soviet military attack that Kennan thought highly unlikely (423-424).

And yet, after laying that responsibility on Kennan, Costigliola concludes the chapter thusly:

More important, however, than the question of guilt for the past were his unceasing, brave, and selfless efforts in the present to disengage America and Russia from the Cold War and a potential nuclear showdown. Unlike virtually every other leader present and active in the creation of the Cold War, Kennan worked hard to reverse course. While he had spent four

years from 1944 to 1948 promoting the Cold War, he devoted the subsequent forty to undoing what he and others had wrought. That's not a bad record (424).

That's also not a bad assessment, one that is sympathetic without absolving Kennan of his sins.

When it later came to address the protest over the American involvement in the Vietnam War, Costigliola notes that Kennan, despite his disagreement with the Johnson administration's escalation of the fighting, took exception to the protestors. His assessment is not kind: "even more revealing, and appalling, than this petulance was Kennan's projecting onto the students blame for damage to the environment and the industrialism sparking it" (429). In short, the protestors were not farmers.

Time and again, Costigliola points to Kennan's short-sightedness. For example, he writes that "Kennan's 1976 appraisal of relations with the Kremlin since the revolution revealed as much about himself as it did about the Russians" (438).

In his discussion of how historians viewed Kennan during his lifetime, Costigliola offers a few trenchant remarks, ones especially barbed for those in the profession. Kennan, he observes, became a punching bag, something for others to hit at whim. As Costigliola puts it, "This was Kennan as comic relief, someone whose anachronisms merited a fond chuckle rather than serious consideration" (528). In response to the speech of Kennan's official biographer and noted historian John Lewis Gaddis at the Advanced Institute's celebration of his 100th birthday, Costigliola notes, it became common for many, in celebrating and honoring Kennan's life, to box him in, or to contain him, so to speak, by highlighting only a portion of his professional significance and contribution rather than considering his life as a whole, and in the process, ignoring the aspects that might not fit into their own worldviews. Costigliola seeks to correct that narrow perspective, and so he does, in admirable fashion.

Unsparring and yet touchingly sympathetic, time and again, Costigliola returns to Kennan's instigation of the Cold War, his misreading of the Soviets and Stalin, and yet, he cannot help but admire the way Kennan pivoted in later years and tried to diminish tensions, promote diplomacy, and bring the two nations together. It is a deeply affecting and decidedly sympathetic portrait, all the while without dismissing or overlooking Kennan's serious flaws as a bigot: a racist, a homophobe, and a xenophobe. Kennan's ideal, as Costigliola points out, was an American pre-immigration boom of the late nineteenth century. He remained throughout his life deeply suspicious of Jews, despite his close relationships with the likes of the father of the atomic bomb, and by the early 1950s, the director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, J. Robert Oppenheimer, who went out of his way to install Kennan at the Institute and further support his career while there.

As Costigliola notes, George Kennan was an environmentalist long before such a position was popular. This is not exactly the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the most consequential American diplomat of the twentieth century, but there it is. Kennan was always worried about his influence, not with the public at large, but with the policymakers, the right people, as it were. No matter the accolades, Kennan wanted to influence policy. That he could not do so was a point of great frustration.

Gaddis was Kennan's official biographer, but as Costigliola points out, "whether this able though conventional political historian could handle the personal side of his subject's life" was a point of concern, and it is in this area where Costigliola excels (494). Thus, the need for this book.⁵

The beauty of Costigliola's opus is the complex weaving together of the professional and the personal, creating a rich tapestry that shines a different kind of light on America's most famous diplomat of the twentieth century. In the process, Kennan becomes deeply human in this treatment. The book is affecting and, at times, when Kennan faced some of his most intense personal problems or professional setbacks, heart-rending. That does not mean that Kennan necessarily comes across as a sympathetic or heroic character. Quite the contrary, as noted, Kennan was, at times, peevish, delusional about the Russian people, his own standing, and at his worst, Kennan held racist and homophobic views that were inappropriate at the time and decidedly do not stand up well today.

Were Kennan still alive today, which is itself an amusing and intriguing thought exercise, he would undoubtedly have angled for a position in the Biden administration, especially since the invasion of Ukraine, as his decades-long worries about nuclear war remain very real. After all, as Costigliola points out with regard to Kennan, admittedly in an earlier time of his life, "he never totally gave up his concerns and aspirations" (393). Kennan wanted to remain relevant to policymakers his entire professional life. For all these reasons George Kennan is a great and enduring subject, and Frank Costigliola has done him justice.

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

 Review by David Milne, University of East Anglia

On 6 June 2000, George Kennan wrote a diary entry restating his faith in John Lewis Gaddis, the historian he had tasked with writing his biography.

I have never regretted the decision to charge him (among many of the others who would have liked to have tried their hand at it) with this biographic task. He is incomparably better informed than anyone else about the diplomacy of those postwar years when I was performing government service. He is a thoroughly honourable person. He will relate faithfully, and against a rich background, all that he knows and finds significant of that time.¹

But Kennan was also concerned about the issues—and there were plenty—on which he and his biographer disagreed. Gaddis admired Kennan as a grand strategist, as a clear-eyed shaper of US foreign policy in the early Cold War. But he was less enamoured of Kennan the vehement critic of many presidents Gaddis regarded highly. That Kennan spent much more of his life attacking US foreign policy than shaping it suggested a vexing disconnect between authorized biographer and subject. This weighed on Kennan, who wondered whether Gaddis was likely to “take a similar interest, and attempt to depict with no less insight, the post-governmental phases of my life and experience—the ones recorded in the *Sketches*, or the philosophical reflections set forth in *Around the Cragged Hill*...”²

Kennan’s diary entry anticipated the myriad qualities and (far fewer) shortcomings of Gaddis’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography.³ In explicating the reasons why Kennan was historically significant, Gaddis has no peer. The sources of Kennan’s renown are the “Long Telegram,” the “X Article,” his contribution to the making of the Marshall Plan, and various other policy recommendations that he dispensed between 1946 and 1949.⁴ The material of those three years is the reason that scholars continue to study Kennan. Gaddis attends to this period expertly, contextualising Kennan’s recommendations through revealing the world he confronted. Without “containment,” Kennan would be remembered, if at all, as a quirky, albeit brilliant, foreign-service officer whose mode of operation alternated between *ex cathedra* and self-flagellation.

But what supercharged Kennan’s post-1950 critique of US foreign policy was the very fact that he had helped design the strategies with which the Cold War was waged. The two cannot be disentangled, and the quality of insight contained in Gaddis’s biography dims as Kennan’s opposition to militarized containment becomes more vociferous. This is most clearly revealed in Gaddis’s discussion of Kennan’s views on President Ronald Reagan, whom Kennan abhorred, but whom Gaddis regards as a grand strategist of the highest order. Gaddis’s biography of Kennan is a wonderful accomplishment. But it is stronger on the first half of Kennan’s life than the second.

Frank Costigliola’s *Kennan: A Life Between Worlds* is not quite the reverse of Gaddis’s book—the discussion of Kennan’s childhood and early years is insightful and engrossing—but it does attend closely and sympathetically to the aspects of Kennan’s life that Kennan feared Gaddis’s biography would neglect. Where Gaddis’s book celebrates the architect of containment and implicitly slights the critic of US foreign policy, Costigliola’s castigates containment and celebrates the critic (Kennan often described himself as an

¹ Diary of George F. Kennan, June 6, 2000, Box 239, George F. Kennan Papers; Public Policy Papers, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

² See George F. Kennan, *Sketches from a Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989) and *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

³ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

⁴ “X,” “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1 July 1947.

“isolationist” in his diary). He lauds his far-sighted views on global warming and his Chekhovian belief that the industrial revolution was a catastrophic departure for humanity (Anton Chekhov was Kennan’s literary hero). Even the books’ covers reveal the authors’ preferred Kennan. On the cover of Gaddis’s book, Kennan in his prime gazes resolutely into the distance, master of all he surveys. A much older Kennan graces the front of Costigliola’s book, looking annoyed about something or other. Read Gaddis’s biography to understand why Kennan matters; read Costigliola’s to understand what made him tick.

Gaddis and Costigliola are not the only scholars who have written on Kennan, of course. Anders Stephanson’s *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* is a fine intellectual history of Kennan’s mode of diplomatic thinking.⁵ It is also a rare example of a study that appeared in his lifetime that Kennan admired. David Mayers’ *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* is a subtle, astute examination of Kennan’s foreign policy career that deserves continued consideration.⁶ Barton Gellman, Walter Hixson, John Lukacs, and Nicholas Thompson have all written books on Kennan.⁷ What sets Gaddis’s and Costigliola’s works apart is that both books were written with full access to Kennan’s papers, including his voluminous diary. As editor of the published edition of the diary, Costigliola draws from it extensively—much more so than Gaddis does. But as Kennan tended to confide his bleakest ruminations to his diary, Costigliola’s book is thus largely rendered in the minor key. Kennan’s racism, antisemitism, snobbery, and philandering also recur throughout Costigliola’s book.⁸

Costigliola’s *Kennan* is a superb read, and the book has many strengths. For all his damning flaws, Kennan is a fascinating subject—a diplomat, a writer, a linguist, a farmer, an engineer, a musician, a sailor, a poet, a woodworker—though I do wonder if it is possible to write a dull book about someone who, as Costigliola puts it, “imputed emotions to nature, empathized with God, and half-believed in fairies” (7). But this book goes above and beyond, and is utterly compelling. Kennan studies are legion, making it even more impressive that Costigliola has written a book so revelatory. Indeed, I probably learned more than I would have liked.

Costigliola is a skilled historian and a graceful, fluent writer. He excavates and reveals Kennan’s family life in astonishing detail. He is deeply interested in Kennan’s psyche and the role played by his volatile emotions in shaping action.⁹ This approach provides so much that is worthwhile, but occasionally Costigliola’s interpretation leans too heavily on it.

⁵ Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁶ David Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷ Barton Gellman, *Contending with Kennan: Toward a Philosophy of American Power* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1984), Walter Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), John Lukacs, *George Kennan: A Study of Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt and Co. 2009). I wrote a chapter on Kennan in David Milne, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015): 217-267.

⁸ For a critique of Kennan as revealed in his diaries, see David Greenberg, “The Misanthropy Diaries: Containment, Democracy and the Prejudices of George Frost Kennan” in Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston, eds., *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021): 254-271. See also David Milne, “The Kennan Diaries,” in Scott Lucas and Bevan Sewell, eds., *Challenging US Foreign Policy: America and the World in the Long Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 56-74.

⁹ On the interplay of emotion and Kennan’s policy recommendation, see Frank Costigliola’s influential 1997 article, “Unceasing Pressure for Penetration?: Gender, Pathology and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, Issue 4 (March 1997): 1309-1339.

To give one example, Costigliola portrays Kennan's Long Telegram as born of a recurring psychological need to lash out and play the martyr.

It was, then, not just his strategic and emotional concerns about the expansion of Stalin's police state but also his practice of seeking 'retribution' and 'martyrdom' by widening the breach and deepening the pain that impelled Kennan to urge containment of Soviet Russia. Containment meant many things. Among them was his saying, in effect: let those in the Kremlin who kept him from the people and the culture he loved 'feel his bitterness' and 'pay for their folly.' If Kennan could not engage freely with Russians, he (and by extension the United States) would almost totally disengage with them (285).

Costigliola's psychoanalytical approach (he returns frequently to Kennan's competing Freudian imperatives of Eros and Civilization) deepens our understanding of Kennan. But it also serves to reduce him to a stropgy teenager, sulking at his refusal to get what he wants. This captures an important explanatory thread, but I yearned for more on the wider international context. In part, I can understand any author's reluctance to write another book on who started the Cold War. But the book would have benefitted from a more expansive discussion of Soviet foreign policy (Costigliola attends closely to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's domestic policies, which Kennan abhorred) and why Kennan perceived it as a significant threat.

Costigliola considers the "Long Telegram," "X," and containment as the gravest missteps of Kennan's career. One can thus appreciate why his interpretation renders containment as an emotionally charged, calamitous detour from a career otherwise defined by judicious, non-interventionist foreign policy advice. But while Kennan was appalled by the way containment was misinterpreted, he did not renege on his belief that his policy recommendations from 1946 to 1948 (excluding those on covert action) were fundamentally sound. Kennan was an orthodox historian of the origins of the Cold War and held the revisionist school in utter contempt. Costigliola's narrative is fascinating on these scholarly battles, from which Kennan does not emerge well. If the Long Telegram was an instinctive flash of righteous anger, it was one that he sustained throughout his entire life. As the quotation that opens this review indicates, Kennan chose Gaddis to write his biography because he understood and applauded the wisdom of applying a strategy of containment at that given time.

Which Kennan biography you prefer will likely correspond with your take on the origins of the Cold War. If, like Kennan, you believe that the Soviet Union under Stalin was a threat to be contained, but that thereafter the United States needlessly escalated the Cold War with devastating consequences, then read John Lewis Gaddis's book on Kennan's first half-century and Frank Costigliola's on the second. Best of all, of course: read both.

Review by Anders Stephanson, Columbia University

George F. Kennan was an emotional man, and Frank Costigliola is deeply interested in the historical subfield of emotions, so it stands to reason that his biography revolves around the fertile interior life of this imposing figure.¹ The contours of Kennan's long life are not a mystery, of course: his own two-volume memoir (of which the first is nothing less than an American classic), several monographs (of which, it should be said, I am responsible for one), John Lewis Gaddis's well received biography from 2011, and Kennan's *Diaries* in an excellent edition by Costigliola himself, with thousands of pages devoted the life and times of George F.² Even when my work appeared in 1989, a senior scholar in the field expressed surprise to me that there was still anything new to say about Kennan. He considered the topic over and done with. Alas, not so. And why not? Every year or so I re-read the Long Telegram and the X Article and find new things in them (though one should not fetishize these two canonical texts, however polyvalent they may be).³ Given the relatively recent Gaddis biography, in any case, it is not odd that Costigliola's object is to write a different kind of personal story with a different emphasis, featuring the inner Kennan and his complexities. For this was a part of Kennan that Gaddis paid attention to and covered but didn't pursue as much, understandably, as he pursued the policymaking and strategic aspects that are so close to his own concerns.

Costigliola, by contrast, pedals through the glory years in the late 1940s in markedly concise fashion, leaving aside the particulars of, say, the celebrated papers of the Policy Planning Staff, George Marshall's General Staff which the 43-year old Kennan headed. What interests Costigliola are rather less accentuated moments in Kennan's private and public life: the roller-coaster year of 1934 in Moscow, for example, which ended with our protagonist about to be laid up convalescing in Vienna for ten months; or the devastating fiasco of his short stint as ambassador in Moscow in 1952 (where he was given nothing to say to the Soviets and thus nothing to Washington either, thus ending up in an sort of echo chamber and losing the plot altogether); or the massive letdown of his disengagement experience in 1957–58 with the Reith Lectures (which hit a raw nerve), with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson clobbering him, as did a largish part of the Atlanticist ruling class.⁴ There was also the famous—or infamous—quarrel with the countercultural and the sometimes

¹ For a convenient introduction, see “AHR Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions,” with participants Nicole Eustace, Eugenia Lean, Julie Livingstone, Jan Plamper, William M. Reddy, and Barbara H. Rosenwein, *American Historical Review* 117:1 (December 2012), 1487-1531.

² George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925 - 1950* (New York: Pantheon, 1983 [1967]); George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1950–1963* (New York: Pantheon, 1983 [1972]); Anders Stephanson, *George F. Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*, ed. Frank Costigliola (New York: Norton, 2014). The chief works of the mid-1980s to early 1990s are Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Barton Gellman, *Contending with Kennan: Toward a Philosophy of American Power* (New York: Praeger, 1984); Walter Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and David Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³ The Long Telegram of 22 February 1946 may be found in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Documents of American Policy and Strategy, 1945 - 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 50-63. The X-Article (“The Sources of the Soviet Conduct”) was published in *Foreign Affairs*, 25:4 (July 1947) 566-583.

⁴ Kennan's Reith Lectures appeared under the title *Russia, the Atom, and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). Acheson was typically blunt in expressing his dissatisfaction with Kennan, and was especially keen to dismiss any notion that the latter's views were sanctioned by the Democratic Party. See the front page of the *New York Times*, 12 January 1958; and in full form, Dean Acheson, “The Illusion of Disengagement,” *Foreign Affairs*, 36:3 (April 1958), 371-382.

radical students of 1968, with whom he actually shared much of the critique of the war in Vietnam. These, at any rate, were dreadful and trying moments for such a sensitive figure as Kennan.

This, then, is all well and good. Rather than write a standard essay/review, however, I will submit a series of disparate comments, questions, and partial disagreements that I hope we can pursue. They are listed here in no particular order.

First, Costigliola indicates on several occasions that Kennan read Freud. Kennan certainly cited him, especially with regard to the allegedly eternal battle between Eros and Civilization (sexuality and creativity versus repression in another idiom): the difficulty in society, but in particular in his own life, to achieve a productive balance of power here. How might one maintain order amidst creativity (and sexuality)? Kennan wrestled with this polarity in his normative views on society as well in his perception of himself as an individual. The figure of Frieda Por, Kennan's physician in Vienna, is invoked, but her possible Freudian element is only conjecture. It seems to me, however, that the only text Kennan actually referred to was *Civilization and its Discontents*, the title being a questionable translation of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*.⁵ This was a work which spoke to him because of his own struggles (and he could reconcile it with a modified version of Calvinism). As for the place of "aggression" or "death wish," there is no elaboration, nor of the psychoanalytical apparatus otherwise. Oedipus anyone? I myself have found no sustained discussion. Am I wrong about this? Kennan tended not to let his readings become sources for extensive commentary.

Relatedly, Kennan describes himself generally as "self-educated"—despite his Princeton background. This seems largely correct. His first impulse when confronted with any given problem was not to read up on the secondary literature to establish his command of the field, but to pursue it in his own mind and from his own angle. I am thinking in particular of his project early on to sort out the concept of 'national interest' (an endeavour that Costigliola does not pursue, but which formed a kind of ground for Kennan's spontaneous realism, as it did for the more theoretical Hans Morgenthau).⁶ As a Burkean conservative, insofar as he was anything, Kennan was attitudinally adverse to abstraction and certainly "theory," but because of his powerfully analytical side he tended to move in a conceptual direction despite himself, so to speak. His binary in PPS 23 (Policy Planning Staff 23), setting US foreign relations within a polarity of universalistic (bad) and particularistic (good) approaches, is an example: a self-serving opposition to be sure, but not your typical policymaking pitch.⁷ He himself advocated his preference for the second alternative on the grounds that policymaking is primarily a matter of judging particularities on their own terms. Thus, he was not happy with "doctrines" of any kind except possibly, if asked, religious ones. Doctrines were abstractions and abstractions were violence to the real.

Costigliola mentions Kennan's letter in April 1948 to Walter Lippmann, an exceedingly plaintive epistle which he did not send—and sensibly so. This, presumably, would have been his response to Lippmann's vigorous critique of the X article in the fall of 1947. Costigliola is silent on Lippmann's articles (the resulting book, *The Cold War*, put the term into general usage).⁸ Given the absence of diary entries, there is as far as I know no account of his immediate reaction to the series of fourteen articles from the premier syndicated pundit in the field: he wrote *relentlessly*, week after week. One wonders especially because in the following year Kennan turned in the direction of Lippmann's position on negotiations and so on, though his letter is chiefly a complaint (in itself justifiable) that the journalist had deliberately and erroneously saddled him with

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2005 [1930]).

⁶ For my own take on Kennan's realism, see Stephanson, *Kennan*, chapter 6, 176-214.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, vol 1:2 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 509-529.

⁸ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1947).

responsibility for the Truman Doctrine while holding up the Marshall Plan as a good alternative when, in fact, he knew that Kennan deplored the former and had been instrumental in bringing about the latter. Still, Kennan had nothing much to say about Lippmann's diagnosis of 'the Cold War' as expressed in the basic tenets of the X article.

Speaking of Lippmann, one recalls Kennan's notable, retrospective comment on the disengagement controversy in 1957–1958 in the second volume of his *Memoirs*.⁹ Lippmann and the French public intellectual Raymond Aron told him that the real is rational or words to that effect, *viz.* the existing division of Europe, the status quo, was now recognized by both sides as stable and better than any risky and unpredictable moves to overcome it. Kennan, who had assumed that the division was unnatural and eventually to be removed, was dumbfounded. He had not seen this, though the experience of Hungary two years earlier might have indicated it. Neither side, of course, recognized this officially. (And there was the continuous, open sore of Berlin.) Meanwhile, the “unnatural” reliance on nuclear weapons, also castigated by Kennan in the Reith Lectures, very much remained an existential threat. (In an earlier phase around 1948–1949, there was his analogous obliviousness to the possibility that the “unnatural” division and the refusal of the US to engage in any serious diplomacy—the Cold War in short—might be in the US interest as an open-ended license to global power, a scenario he dreaded, or at any rate would have dreaded.)¹⁰

In his account of “The Sources of the Soviet Conduct,” Kennan got away with a single throwaway sentence about the Soviet experience of World War II.¹¹ The lacuna is astonishing. He was writing two years after the end of a conflict which had devastated the Soviet Union, left 25-27 million dead, and destruction on an unimaginable scale of a large part of European Russia. Let's assume something similar had happened to the United States and an informed Soviet observer had pondered the sources of the US conduct afterwards, “the personality” of the regime, and ignored that experience. It would have been absurd. Certainly, the leeway for an imaginary “Poland” in the given circumstances would have been quite limited. Yet Kennan was not called on this (not even by Lippmann), and he says nothing much in retrospect either. How can this be? This is Gaddis Country, but it would be interesting to hear Costigliola's view. Part of the problem has to do with Kennan's analytical positioning as a doctor observing/diagnosing a viral entity under a microscope or, alternatively, a doctor diagnosing a psychologically damaged and aggressive patient in need of confinement. Not a dialectical view, you might say.

Kennan disparaged nationalism, which he considered a daft but dangerous kind of “romantic” pastime of typically resentful intellectuals (I'm exaggerating slightly, but it takes a resentful intellectual to come up with that verdict).¹² He himself was indeed a classic “romantic” in the early nineteenth-century sense: a profound attachment to nature and “natural” balance, anti-urbanism, hostility to the “artificial,” to machines and machine-like processes, commitment to aesthetics, style or form as transcendence, and so forth. At the same time, he was a classic Realist: he viewed the world as being comprised of clashing interests, and dismissed ideological justifications as less than real. How do the twain meet? Realism was for the domain of foreign relations, the system. Here he represented the State Department loyally as a very professional diplomat but also as a Russian “expert,” that is, representing a government hierarchy, a bureaucratic agency engaged in struggle with other entities of the same ilk: there was no room for “idealism” and lofty sentiments, defense of the realm above all. Much as he resented the Department (and on occasion, without success, resigned from it,

⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs, 1950 - 1963*, 252-257.

¹⁰ I develop this point at greater length in Anders Stephanson, “Coldwar Degree Zero,” in Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, eds., *Uncertain Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19-49.

¹¹ “X,” “The Sources of the Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, 25:4 (July 1947), 566-583.

¹² I have in mind the classic Nietzschean move on *ressentiment*: locating in the intellectuals the agent sucking the power and strength out of the masterful by inventing morality tales to hide their own jealousies and shortcomings. This reversal, in turn, will itself then have been the product of *ressentiment*, namely, that of Friedrich Nietzsche himself.

until he was de facto fired by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles), Kennan was politically lost without it. I don't mean "lost" as in dazed and confused, but lost as in having nowhere to go as a political individual. He became, to be sure, a highly celebrated public intellectual who could state and restate his litany of ills (many of them justified), but without a proper place on the political map. At no point in his many urgent pleas for change did he ever present any plausible—realistic—view of a strategic way, or some political agent, by which to achieve it. Meanwhile, his policymaking stand in the Realist sphere after he had left the Department was out of tune (as well it might be) with the reigning orthodoxy. So he was forever doomed, as he himself sensed, to play the alienated and alienating role of telling truth to power from the outside. (Pity he didn't make it to the Senate. It would have been lively.)

Kennan's Realism, in any case, was also tempered by his foundational notion of "intimacy." It cuts across everything. States and societies, groups and individuals, can be closer in that sense to one another. Or not. The non-proximate ones, such as the Third World, can never be intimate with the west. The antonym here, "distance," is both literal and personal/cultural. From here it is but a short step to proper "separation," which is what happened in his deference to the South African case: white supremacy parading as difference. The problem of intimacy remains to be explored in full, but I'm not sure how. It would be insufficient, however persuasive, to derive the predicament from his lifelong sense of loss because of the death of his mother when he was an infant. There is more to it than that.

It also remains to assess Kennan as a historian. His dictated lecture histories can be remarkably good as essays and historical argument of a certain kind. His "professional" histories, devoted to foreign relations and matters diplomatic, are weighed down in the early days—the 1950s when the two volumes appeared on the Russian exit from World War I and the ensuing intervention against the new Bolshevik regime—by a misplaced obligation to fulfill the empirical (and empiricist) standards in the field.¹³ The most interesting, analytical chapter was left out because he worried it was not grounded enough, was too speculative. In the 1970s, he returned to World War I, which he considered the great catastrophe of the twentieth century from the viewpoint of the West. Again, he produced two volumes, now on the origins and going back all the way to the 1870s. Typically, these works did not come near what he had originally projected, but they are much more assured in style and content than his endeavours in the 1950s.¹⁴ Indeed, his first volume, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations 1875-1890*, is a masterpiece of diplomatic history as it used to be done at its best: delineating how the upper echelons of the system understood (incompletely) the given circumstances and generated policies, which were often faulty, to deal with them. As a phenomenological investigation of the limits of diplomacy, it is unsurpassed.

Religion, too, is an understudied problem (along with style): seemingly straightforward but not really. I failed myself rather miserably. Listing a set of archetypal Calvinist features (order, work ethic, duty, repression, interrogation of the self, etc.) on one side, and Kennan's obvious compliance with them on the other, I had nothing more substantial to say.¹⁵ Costigliola does not confront it in any serious way either; nor does Gaddis, a couple of noteworthy pages notwithstanding. At a later stage, I began to wonder about signs of a certain "foreign" flirtation with Catholicism, the intra-Christian antithesis of Calvinist propriety. In a way, Kennan's oblique gestures in that direction were not surprising: a goodish number of deeply conservative, organicist intellectuals, especially in the interwar period, had found Catholicism an appealing "solution" to the problems

¹³ Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920: Vol 1, Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956) and *Vol 2, The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

¹⁴ Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: The Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Typically, Kennan's original plan for the exercise got nowhere near completion: he was just too punctilious about getting it right.

¹⁵ Stephanson, *Kennan*, 248-251.

of capitalist atomization: patriotic but not nationalist devotion to hierarchy and liturgical power, ceremonial submission, and symbolic power.¹⁶ In Kennan's case, it was typically not a matter of doctrine and religious coherence but (I think) a certain political affinity. For two regimes that he spontaneously liked were both arch-Catholic and on the right, *viz.* Salazar's Portugal (reactionary) and the dissolved, multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian empire of the Habsburgs (conservative but intermittently more open). Lurking in the background was plausibly a kind of medievalist, European *Res Publica Christiana*, a community of the West, suitably hierarchical, suffused by the visible institution of the Church as a mediating power between heaven and earth, featuring a certain functioning ethics extending into the aesthetic (form). Thus, it was perhaps not a surprise when, late in life, Kennan became an Episcopalian, the closest one can come to Catholicism within Protestantism.

Costigliola generally avoids historiographical engagement. One sees why: the biography is bound to be long even without it, and the intended audience is not necessarily interested in the finer points of Kennaniana. The potential danger of reinventing the wheel is indeed largely avoided in the book.

Still, there is a problem. It is to do with the relationship between Gaddis and Kennan. I am not referring to Gaddis's biography and its differences with Costigliola's counterpoint, but to the process of producing it: the long period between the agreement to do the authorized work and the actual appearance of the magnum opus six years after Kennan's death in 2005. This process and relationship (beginning in the 1970s) is covered by Costigliola, quite appropriately, as part of the biographical record, and his account of the sequence is a spirited one. By the 1970s, Kennan was becoming increasingly exercised by the possibility that his place in history would be subject to all manner of faulty, misguided, incompetent, shallow, etc., treatments. More specifically, he was worried about how his deposited (voluminous) papers would be used. Gaddis, meanwhile, had come to the rescue in one of Kennan's tussles with a younger scholar on the eternal question of whether containment was political or military; and from then on the eventual deal for an authorized, posthumous biography was in the offing.¹⁷ Neither Kennan nor Gaddis imagined the moment would take a quarter century to arrive. During this time, Gaddis became increasingly prominent in the field, while moving rightward under the influence of Reagan and the resurrected primacy of ideology, relinquishing his erstwhile neo-realist proposition that the Cold War was really a long peace. Meanwhile, there was a widening bevy of others writing about Kennan in the 1980s, which made the subject himself antsy. Gaddis's geopolitical divergence worried him too, for example when it came to the treatment of disengagement (I actually think Gaddis's book is credible on that). There was also Kennan's conviction that a properly psychological work would perhaps be advisable, along the model of Leon Edel's biography of Henry James, which was not exactly Gaddis's comfort zone.¹⁸

¹⁶ Anders Stephanson, "Kennan's *Abendland*: On Nationalism, Europe, and the West," (unpublished mss). For an indication of Late Kennan on Catholicism, see the passages in Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (New York: Norton, 1993). He says it should be respected "for its grandeur in scope and concept; for its very catholicity; for its paternal understanding for the needs of humble people everywhere; for its recognition of the values of order, and even hierarchy, in the spiritual guidance of great masses of people." In the end it is "one of the greatest institutions of Western culture," and much of the same is true "for some of its partially rebellious children—outstandingly, the Church of England" 40-50.

¹⁷ The perennial question of Kennan's "containment as really intended," and his insistence that it was political rather than military, was (and is) misconstrued. Containment, as it happened, was largely political, but in the last instance also included a military component should the situation so require, as it did for Kennan in a few cases. The immediate controversy that led to Kennan's indignation, and then to Gaddis's engagement, was caused by C. Ben Wright's article, "Mr 'X' and Containment," *Slavic Review*, 35:1 (March 1976), 1-31.

¹⁸ Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master 1901-1916* (New York: Harper/Collins 1987 [1972]). This was the fifth and final volume of Edel's biography. Gaddis, it should be added, devoted a good deal of serious study to the genre of

The point, in any event, is that Gaddis's book becomes part of the historical record of Costigliola's book, and not just another biographer of its subject. Moreover, Costigliola discloses a number of judgments on other interested parties writing on Kennan (with less access). There is, then, a historiographical engagement in the book, if only of a second-order kind. Thus, one wants to know how Costigliola relates to this over and above his account of Gaddis's work with Kennan. What of these judgments? How shall we read them?

(There is a curious, almost comical symmetry, meanwhile, between Gaddis's futile attempt to persuade Kennan of the virtues of Ronald Reagan and Costigliola's recurring complaints about Kennan's failure to see the perspicuity of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his foreign policy).¹⁹

Kennan's marriage to Annelise Sørensen over 74 years is invoked throughout this book, as it was in Gaddis's, which is dedicated to her. We are told of difficulties and Kennan's intermittent affairs (or at least desire for them); but we learn little about the specifics. Is this discretion, or simply a topic that cannot be adequately researched? Given Kennan's boundless egocentrism, Annelise must have been a very strong and patient person. Costigliola's treatment of her is incomplete. He remarks on her unsentimental approach to child care which was ever so often farmed out to George's elder sister (not that George was filling in). Annelise was also keen on having servants (diplomatic life tends to be a matter of sharp contrasts, abundant abroad, very much less so at home). So, Costigliola's treatment of her is marked by ambivalence. There was an aspect of Norwegian no-nonsense on the one hand (if I may be a bit reductionist), and bourgeois markers on the other. A more extensive account of her Norwegian family background would have been valuable. My impression is that the family was not rich but solid, regional burghers. One assumes that not many young women in Kristiansand around 1930 were sent off to France and then Berlin to learn languages, etc.

Why did Kennan remain a celebrated "sage" of sorts, feted (on the whole) by the Establishment, a much-requested speaker, a figure in demand? The answer, aside from his obvious qualities as a (productive) writer and speaker in the first place, is that he was a historic figure of continued renown and relevance, a public intellectual whose views on foreign relations and other matters had a certain resonance, if nothing else precisely because he was Kennan, the proverbial "architect of containment" and the Cold War who happened, notably and interestingly, to repent. At the same time, he was not a threat to the order of things—except perhaps in his moment of controversy around disengagement in 1957–1958 and as a critic of the war in Vietnam in 1966. Generation after generation of the policymaking elite will have been schooled, too, in "containment" as a master signifier, read the classic texts, wrestled with predictable exam questions. A powerful narrative, a shorthand, attached to him that could render legible the whole postwar direction of "the US in the world."

There is no escape from the subject-matter. Just ask China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

"biography." Costigliola's account of the historiographical ins and outs here may be found in the section on Kennan and Gaddis in chapter 11, "Almost Unstoppable."

¹⁹ See Gaddis, *Kennan—An American Life*, 670-71 especially: Kennan would not budge, ultimately, on Reagan. Gaddis's subtitle, as my friend Ann Douglas reminds me, directly invokes Reagan's memoirs: *An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990). As for Costigliola, he is dismayed at Kennan's shortcomings regarding Roosevelt most explicitly: "Kennan neither admired Roosevelt as a person, respected his political skills, or grasped his foreign policy vision" (198).

Response by Frank Costigliola, University of Connecticut

Quitting George is tough. Whether we view George F. Kennan as admirable for his abilities, appalling for his prejudices, or both, we, meaning most historians of American foreign relations, find him difficult to forget. And we historians are not alone. Nearly two decades after his death and more than three-quarters of a century after his iconic Long Telegram and Mr. “X” article, Kennan remains pertinent also to contemporary affairs.¹ His name still appears, usually in the context of “containing” Russia or China, in front-page articles of the *New York Times*. In January 2023, when I pitched to *Foreign Affairs* what I deemed a long shot—an article on Kennan and the current war in Ukraine—the editor agreed that same day, and “Kennan’s Warning on Ukraine” appeared shortly thereafter.²

Interest in Kennan sustained, I hope, my reviewers as they read the book. I thank them for their persistence as well as their thoughtful criticism. Michaela Hoenicke Moore, T. Christopher Jespersen, David Milne, and Anders Stephanson each bring to this forum deep expertise and insights.

Before getting to their critiques, I want to make two basic points. First, the buzz surrounding Kennan is a political and cultural phenomenon, a kind of spectacle. He remains a touchstone not only because of what he wrote and did, but also because of how he dramatized it all. Second, what is at stake in our evaluation of Kennan is literally a matter of life and death. Kennan’s guiding star from 1948 onward was the imperative of preventing a third world war. While most US and Russian leaders pay lip service to that aim, even as they risk a holocaust, Kennan kept the danger front and center during the Cold War and afterward. Today’s rising tensions with Russia and with China have again heightened the peril of nuclear war and, sadly, the relevance of Kennan’s warnings.

Drama imbued much of Kennan’s 101-year life. Consider, for example, his early decades: Growing up motherless in a riven family with bizarre finances; pinching pennies at Princeton unaware of his considerable inherited wealth; getting engaged to the daughter of Washington power brokers who, convinced that he would never amount to much, ditched him; undertaking covert investigations in Berlin while still in his twenties; immersing himself so deeply in Russian life that he suffered physical and mental collapse; observing up close Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s show trials of figures he had known personally; laboring in wartime Berlin and meeting secretly with the democratic-leaning aristocrat, Helmuth von Moltke, who he pledged to help with a post-Hitler government; negotiating in wartime Lisbon, not only with Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, but also with the rival British and with quarreling US diplomatic, military, and intelligence operatives; insisting, cheekily, on personal meetings, which went badly, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Then followed the almost made-for-TV story of how a young, obscure diplomat in far-off Moscow burst onto the scene with a solution to America’s foreign policy dilemma. At a time when many Americans feared that the US had either to acquiesce in the further expansion of Soviet Communism or go to war with Russia, Kennan, in two persuasive manifestos, the Long Telegram and an originally anonymous article in *Foreign Affairs*, offered an attractive third alternative: containment. Furthermore, that strategy could lead to the eventual break-up of Soviet power, he predicted. Finally, as Hoenicke Moore aptly puts it, the Long Telegram “was also a successful job application: a year later Kennan became the inaugural director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff.” His purview now encompassed planning for all of US foreign policy; his

¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 547-59; X [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (July 1947), 566-82

² Frank Costigliola, “Kennan’s Warning on Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/george-kennan-warning-on-ukraine>

office stood next door to that of Secretary of State George C. Marshall. Kennan's success story was played up by media in both the US and Western Europe.

While drama was intrinsic to his life story, Kennan popularized the narrative through his lectures, articles, and books, especially his elegantly written, best-selling *Memoirs 1925-1950*.³ Ever since his days at Princeton, Kennan, inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald, had yearned to write a great American novel. Fearing that he would lose himself in the project or, worse, fail, he never took the plunge. Instead, he empowered his non-fiction with novelistic flair. He enlivened his writing with striking images, emotion-evoking language, and fantastical projections. Hoenicke Moore was so "entirely enchanted" upon encountering the "famous fairies" in Kennan's memoir that decades later, she remembers where she was sitting when soaking in those words. Similarly riveting was Kennan's prose in depicting the goblin goading America. An oft-quoted passage in his Long Telegram warns of a "political force committed fanatically to the belief...that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure."⁴ How, precisely, this scarily non-human "political force" was going to achieve those gargantuan aims, Kennan did not say, and most readers, enchanted, have not asked.

Kennan's melodrama could over-reach. He crafted arguments so persuasive that sometimes they went beyond what he himself believed. In casting Soviet expansion as an existential threat, Kennan helped foster the militarization of the Cold War. Though for decades he protested that he had intended containment to encompass only economic and political measures, he had rung the alarm bell so loudly that a military buildup seemed warranted. Only in a 1996 television interview did the ninety-two year-old acknowledge that he should have, a half-century earlier, explicitly stated that the Soviet Union, which was at the time still devastated by World War II, did not pose a serious military threat.

While downplaying his responsibility for helping instigate a military approach to the Soviet challenge, Kennan—beginning in 1948, and thereafter with increasing frequency and urgency—pushed for diplomacy with Moscow to reduce tensions and the threat of war. The international context for appraising Kennan's peace efforts is analyzed in Martin J. Sherwin's recent *Gambling with Armageddon: Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Sherwin emphasizes how simple happenstance, what former Secretary of State Dean Acheson admitted was "plain dumb luck," was crucial to humanity's escaping nuclear holocaust during the Cuban missile crisis and at other times in the Cold War.⁵

The risk of mass death and destruction of everything we hold dear is a prospect so ghastly that it seems impolite, even pornographic, to mention it in scholarly discourse. For us, the threat mounts once again. For Kennan, the looming horror was so palpable that it permeated his thinking. This existential peril is the most pertinent background for evaluating Kennan's Sisyphean efforts: his desperate attempt to initiate talks with the Soviets while ambassador in 1952, his Reith lectures in 1957, his testimony against the Vietnam War in 1966, his speaking out against the nuclear arms race in the 1970s–80s, and his warnings about the eastward expansion of NATO in the 1990s.

Still relevant are two further concerns of Kennan. He saw increasing reliance on petroleum, machines, and technology as precarious, especially because this dependence displaced more natural and sustainable

³ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967).

⁴ Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950*, 557.

⁵ Martin J. Sherwin, *Gambling with Armageddon: Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Knopf, 2020), 4.

alternatives. Similar was Kennan's pioneering concerns about the pollution of the atmosphere and the oceans and the despoliation of the land with waste dumps and suburban sprawl.

With this preface on Kennan's continuing importance, I will address the thoughtful remarks of the reviewers.

T. Christopher Jespersen's generous appraisal of the book leaves me in his debt — including for several beers at the next SHAFR meeting. As he perceives, “No matter the accolades, Kennan wanted to influence policy.” Jespersen knows Kennan well from his edited collection of interviews with the strategist.⁶ I have only two picayune points. First, I raise grass-fed Devon beef cattle, not dairy cattle. And second, John Lewis Gaddis spoke not at Kennan's 100th birthday ceremony at the Institute for Advanced Study, but rather at Princeton University's celebration two days later.

Michaela Hoenicke Moore, who has written extensively about Kennan's milieu, is also kind in her assessment.⁷ She does, however, fault me as insufficiently critical of Kennan's foibles and jumbo-sized ego. As she perceptively observes about Kennan as spectacle, he “continues to serve as a screen onto which readers, foreign policy scholars, and interested audiences project their own desires, understanding, and current policy preferences.” I would add that the name “Kennan” has come to symbolize the Wise Man or Wise Woman who, seemingly out of nowhere, comes up with a solution for our otherwise intractable problems. Hence the refrain in the press, “We need another Kennan.” Or “Who is the Kennan of today?”

I agree with Hoenicke Moore that Kennan, despite his two and a half years living in wartime Nazi Germany, failed to appreciate the enormity of the Third Reich's horrors. Nor did he understand or value Franklin D. Roosevelt's domestic or foreign policies. Kennan also stumbled at times by projecting himself so intensely into the scene he was analyzing.

Nevertheless, we need to look more closely at the political leaning of those “peers and superiors” of Kennan who judged him “as not entirely reliable and trustworthy in his political judgment, analysis, and behavior.” To be sure, Kennan's gaffe, his mental breakdown really, at Berlin's Tempelhof airport in September 1952, when he compared the isolation of foreigners in Soviet Russia to the isolation he had endured in wartime Nazi Germany, was not only inexcusable, but also the greatest error of his life. Still, much of the judgment by associates that Kennan was not “reliable and trustworthy” reflected seismic policy differences. Several of those cited by Hoenicke Moore as doubting Kennan's strength or ability ranked as ardent Cold Warriors: Paul M. Nitze, Dorothy Fosdick, and Mary Acheson Bundy, who on these issues channeled her father, Dean Acheson.

Pertinent here also is Hoenicke Moore's faulting Kennan for his “increasingly corrective and contrary analyses, criticizing what he had helped usher in.” The story is more nuanced. From 1948 onward, Kennan regarded containment as an “if-then” proposition. If the Soviets were contained, then the United States should move on to negotiate compromise solutions, thereby easing the threat of war. By contrast, nearly all of Kennan's peers and superiors, including secretaries of state Acheson, John Foster Dulles and their successors, regarded containment as an axiom. They valued containment as an end in itself, as a forever-valuable policy to be pursued indefinitely, or until the Soviet Union surrendered. For most officials and commentators, and certainly for those deemed “reliable” and “responsible,” waging the Cold War offered significant advantages in America's pursuit of global influence. Quite different was the “not entirely reliable and trustworthy”

⁶ T. Christopher Jespersen, ed., *Interviews with George F. Kennan* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).

⁷ Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-45* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Kennan, who perceived the Cold War and post-Cold War tensions with Russia as a ticking time bomb. That the bomb has not yet gone off does not mean it is not dangerous.

David Milne's chapter on Kennan in his *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* is well-researched and thoughtful.⁸ I am gratified that he found my book a "superb read," and I value his praise.

I also appreciate that the structure of Milne's review affords an opportunity to make some larger points about the appeal and the peril of binaries, a topic that Milne flags in his own book. Milne's review illustrates how an argument can be contained by its own structure. Not until the 529th word of his 1,740-word essay does Milne mention the title or author of the book that are the topic of this forum. The first twenty-eight percent of his review focuses instead on establishing the primacy of John Lewis Gaddis's *Kennan: An American Life*.⁹

This emphasis on Gaddis is fitting for multiple reasons. His book remains the authorized biography of Kennan. It snared the Pulitzer Prize. And Gaddis will rank, always, as the sole biographer entitled to claim that George and Annelise Kennan were for many years "my companions."¹⁰

Affirming the normative primacy of Gaddis's book also fits—indeed it is essential to—the logical scaffolding of Milne's review. Milne makes sense of the relationship between *Kennan: An American Life* and *Kennan: a Life between Worlds* by structuring a polarity contrasting the two books and their respective approaches. A polarity (sometimes called a binary) constructs meaning by positioning one value or idea as fundamentally different from another value or idea. It is common to derive and to organize meaning in terms of polarities. Examples include self/other, rational/emotional, primary/secondary, important/trivial, sound/foolish, male/female, and, as Milne emphasizes in *Worldmaking*, art/science. The polarizing pull within each set of contrasts minimizes slippage in terms of meaning. In other words, self is distinct from other; sound differs from foolish; and rational means not emotional. Moreover, the first item in each polarity is according to convention the normative or superior value. Polarities reduce complexities to clear-cut, easily understandable, "common-sensical," differentiated categories.¹¹ As Milne puts it in his book, binaries "can be helpful because they capture elemental forces."¹²

The problem, however, is that by reducing complexity to easily graspable difference, we can lose sight of the subtlety and even the substance of an issue. Moreover, once we have erected our structure of opposing categories, it is tempting to squeeze our analysis into it, even if it impoverishes understanding. Again, Milne is instructive. Binaries "can also sometimes mislead, for to paraphrase Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, people are 'large' and 'contain multitudes'."¹³

It is a bit ironic, then, that while Milne is attuned to the problems with a binary analysis, his review is structured on that very basis. He states, unequivocally, that Kennan's work from 1946-49 with regard to the Long Telegram, the Mr. "X" article, and contributing to the Marshall Plan is "why Kennan was historically significant." And in telling this story, "Gaddis has no peer." (I agree with that assessment of Gaddis's work.)

⁸ David Milne, *Worldmaking The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Kennan An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

¹⁰ Gaddis, *Kennan*, xi.

¹¹ For a full discussion, see Costigliola, "Reading for Meaning" in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 279-303.

¹² Milne, *Worldmaking*, 9.

¹³ Milne, *Worldmaking*, 9.

Milne repeats that these achievements are “the sources of Kennan’s renown.” And, again, “those three years [are] the reasons that scholars continue to study Kennan.” No ambiguity here.

Milne buttresses his thesis about the primacy of Kennan’s work as a Cold Warrior in 1946–49 by juxtaposing the serious policy strategist and his serious biographer with their near opposites. He writes that “Frank Costigliola’s *Kennan: A Life between Worlds* is not quite the reverse of Gaddis’s book”—but it comes close to that, in Milne’s analysis. In contrast to the depicted heft of Kennan the Cold Warrior is the portrait of Kennan the critic as a lightweight, a flake, almost a fool. “Without ‘containment,’” Milne writes, “Kennan would be remembered, if at all, as a quirky, albeit brilliant foreign-service officer whose mode of operation alternated between ex cathedra and self-flagellation.”

Shunted into insignificance if not inanity by this polarity are Kennan’s post-1949 achievements as a prize-winning historian; broadcaster of the Reith lectures, which forced a haughty Establishment to defend its nuclear policies; pioneering critic of the Vietnam War; stalwart of the nuclear arms debates of the 1970s-80s; and post-Cold War strategist. In this last capacity, the nonagenarian warned that the eastward expansion of NATO would undermine democracy and foster militarism in Russia, reignite the Cold War, and threaten armed conflict.

Milne is little impressed with Kennan’s efforts to lessen the risks of nuclear war. The introduction to *Worldmaking* highlights the dispute in 1950 between Kennan and his successor at the Policy Planning Staff, Paul M. Nitze, over whether the US should escalate the arms race by constructing a hydrogen bomb. Milne judges Kennan’s advice to seek a deal with Russia not to build the bomb as “well-intentioned but dangerous.” Slighting the record of successful arms control agreements later negotiated between Washington and Moscow, Milne lauds Nitze’s argument for developing the hydrogen bomb as being in tune with “hard reality” and “the lessons of history.”¹⁴

Milne’s positioning of Kennan as on the wrong side of reality and history affords little space for appreciating this thinker’s antediluvian, yes, but also prescient skepticism about unchecked technology. Although George Kennan died long before ChatGPT began its sway, he warned that machines could slip dangerously out of control.

The siren appeal of a polarity tempts us to find meanings that fit within our presuppositions. Consider, for instance, Milne’s analysis of the photos gracing the covers of the two biographies: “On the cover of Gaddis’s book, Kennan in his prime gazes resolutely into the distance, master of all he surveys.” This interpretation matches Milne’s understanding of Kennan in 1946–49: vigorous, far-seeing, and powerful. Though logical in terms of the binary, the description is faulty in terms of history.¹⁵ The photograph was taken on 24 October 1952, just after Kennan’s gaffe comparing the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany had gotten him declared *persona non grata*—the only US ambassador ever expelled from Russia. An abashed Kennan was lying low in Heidelberg, West Germany because the Truman administration was so embarrassed by his outburst that it had forbidden him to return home until after the upcoming US elections.

Should this mistake be faulted? Not overly much. The date and circumstances of the cover photograph do not appear in Gaddis’s book. The problem is not this particular error, but rather the more general difficulty

¹⁴ Milne, *Worldmaking*, 8.

¹⁵FPG/Staff, “Kennan Recalled: U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union George F. Kennan (1904 - 2005) in Heidelberg, Germany after his recall from Moscow, 24th October 1952,” Getty Archive Photos (Huty1677741), <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/george-f-kennan>.

that rigid presuppositions are springboards for jumping to appealing, though erroneous, conclusions. Despite the internal consistency of Milne's presuppositions—that is why a structure of polarity can be so persuasive—his neat formula conflicts with the historical evidence.

So, too, with Milne's take on the photo on the cover of my book. Here an older Kennan, definitely not "resolute" or the "master of all he surveys," is looking close up and pensive. What accounts for Kennan's apparent mood in this 1985 photograph, taken near the family's summer-time home in Norway, is not apparent or recorded. Certainly, the eighty-one-year-old, who suffered severe arthritis in his knees, heart problems, and other ailments, may have just been feeling lousy. Or perhaps he was reflecting on the unhappy state of the world. We do not know. What is significant, however, is how Milne's preconceptions influence his perceptions. While Gaddis's presumptively rational Kennan looks serene, Costigliola's emotional Kennan looks "annoyed about something or other." Kennan was often annoyed. But his concerns were real and often substantive. Trivializing Kennan's unhappiness, if indeed that was his mood, as stemming from "something or other" makes for assumption-affirming meaning, but shaky history.

In the last part of his review, Milne revisits that forever-topic, Kennan's Long Telegram. He attributes to me a "psychoanalytic approach" because I return "frequently to Kennan's competing Freudian imperatives of Eros and Civilization." Actually, I do not take a psychoanalytic approach. I do repeatedly refer to that dichotomy, not because I believe in Freudian theory, but because Kennan described his life and dilemmas in terms of a conflict between Eros and Civilization. I could as easily have used the less evocative terms of Freedom versus Obligation. I am neither trained as a psychologist nor do I operate from some comprehensive psychological or psychoanalytic theory. What I do in this book is take seriously the evidence of Kennan's inner life, evidence mediated by Kennan's own words and actions. As Hoenicke Moore points out, I try to read the evidence closely, as historians can and should do.

Milne writes that I portray the Long Telegram "as born of a recurring psychological need [of Kennan] to lash out and play the martyr." As I argue in the book, however, the famous telegram was born of not this single impulse, but rather of a mix of political and personal imperatives. On pages 281-87, I detail the political, strategic, cultural, and other elements that fed Kennan's rising frustration and anger and helped fuel his Long Telegram. To attribute to me the claim that the Long Telegram was "an instinctive flash of righteous anger" is to simplify a complex causation to the point of distortion. I agree with Milne that we should not "reduce [Kennan] to a stropky teenager, sulking at his refusal to get what he wants," but avoiding that reduction requires stepping away from the polarity and accepting subtlety, nuance, and complexity.

Finally, a small but significant detail: Milne advises, "read John Lewis Gaddis's book on Kennan's first half century and Frank Costigliola's on the second." Gaddis's book is much more detailed than mine on the 1946-49 period. Nevertheless, my book devotes 256 pages to the story of Kennan's life from his birth to his dictating the Long Telegram, as compared to Gaddis's 212 pages. More importantly, I rely on a trove of archival documents not used by Gaddis to trace how Kennan in the 1930s launched the education in global affairs that he would draw upon as director of the Policy Planning Staff in 1947-49. While in Berlin and in Moscow, Kennan researched and sent to the State Department myriads of reports on matters ranging from German investment in Russia, to China's rivalry with Japan, to Soviet arctic exploration, to international reaction to the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby.

These points notwithstanding, I appreciate David Milne's impressive effort to appraise my book in the broad context of his own important work and the Gaddis biography. This is the kind of discussion we need more of in our forums and journals.

Taking an even broader look at Kennan is the review by Anders Stephanson. Stephanson's 1989 book on Kennan bears the distinction of being the only biography that this picky connoisseur of his life's story actually

read and liked.¹⁶ In his review Stephanson offers a pot pourri of thoughtful observations and an agenda for yet another biography of Kennan.

Stephanson notes that while Kennan praised Sigmund Freud, the only book to which he refers specifically is *Civilization and Its Discontents*.¹⁷ Kennan used the argument therein, about the unavoidable dilemma of Eros versus Civilization, as a way to frame his own personal conflict. Nevertheless, Kennan did read, or was influenced by, more than this one book. He started reading about psychology while still in college. In addition to his own reading, he absorbed the popular interests in psychology that permeated educated circles in Europe and in America through much of the twentieth century. He began using pop psychological terminology in his analysis of Russia. In 1942, when Kennan and about 150 other Americans were interned by the Germans at Bad Neuheim, they set up an informal “university” to help pass the time. Kennan wrote a series of lectures on Russian history and culture, largely from memory since he had few books with him. His lectures emphasized, with regard to Russian history, the “parallel between the childhood psychology of peoples and individuals...developed by Freud” (236).

As Stephanson points out, Kennan favored shaping foreign policy on the basis of particularities rather than abstract doctrines. Also important was sensibility. In a 1950 document recently unearthed in the National Archives, Kennan appraised the output of the Policy Planning Staff under his leadership. He ranked as better those papers originating from Staff members with “what may be called feel for the situation,” as opposed to those papers arising from “assembling an analysis of factual material.”¹⁸ In other words, organic interest, long-term familiarity, and emotional engagement yielded deeper insights than bureaucratic staff work.

With regard to Walter Lippmann, Kennan regretted having rendered himself such an easy mark for the columnist’s criticism in 1947. While coming to like Lippmann, Kennan also envied him. In 1975, while sitting in Washington National Cathedral during the memorial service for Lippmann, Kennan rued “my failure, as great as his success, to make any mark upon the governing establishment of this country.” This was especially frustrating because his own insights, Kennan believed, though “less practical, less adjusted to the contemporary scene, [and] less immediately useful” than Lippmann’s, stood out, for that very reason, as “bolder, more penetrating, and more prophetic than his” (529).

As for the 1957–58 argument by Lippmann and the French public intellectual Raymond Aron that the existing division of Europe was stable and preferable to any change, Kennan was prescient, nonetheless, about the instability that would ensue. The installation of nuclear weapons on both sides of the division in Europe had the effect, as Kennan had warned, of heightening tensions and the risk of war. That danger escalated in the Berlin crises of 1958–59 and 1961–62. As Kennan had argued in the Reith lectures in late 1957, divided Berlin remained a critical flashpoint. He had urged the negotiated reunification of Germany in part to heal what Stephanson acknowledges was “the continuous, open sore of Berlin.”

I share Stephanson’s puzzlement that in his Mr. “X” article, “Kennan got away with a single throwaway sentence” about the Soviets’ massive suffering in World War II. We need to remember, however, that that article, as well as the Long Telegram, were not balanced arguments, but rather manifestos. Kennan intended these emotionally evocative statements to persuade, and that they did with audiences who were already primed to be persuaded.

¹⁶ Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021).

¹⁸ Kennan to Webb, June 14, 1950, 110.11/6-1460, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, College Park, MD. My thanks to David Langbart for finding and sharing this document.

With regard to the polarity between Kennan's romantic bent and his reputation for realism, the latter seems to me much exaggerated. Further, Kennan reconciled the two poles in part with his faith in the efficacy of diplomacy.

A prime reason that Kennan remains relevant today is that he remained, in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, a true believer in the power of diplomacy to reconcile differences. He argued that the practices of diplomacy, its culture, was key. Success required slow, patient, secret talks in good faith, between professional diplomats who understood the culture and politics of the other side. Only then, and with sufficient circumstantial pressure, might room open for smaller and, then, larger, agreements. Diplomacy should be premised not on elusive trust between opponents, but rather on the bedrock of shared mutual interest. What may seem like irreconcilable differences at the onset of a negotiation, Kennan argued, was just the asking price before the bargaining commenced.

Kennan's quest for, and escape from, intimacy was, as Stephanson points out, a key aspect of his personality. While not all these impulses derived from his reactions to the loss of his mother at the age of two months—the foundational episode of his life, as Kennan told the story—much did stem from that trauma. As a member of the Policy Planning Staff perceived, Kennan upheld “a certain aloofness in his personal relationships.” That attitude carried into his attitude toward foreign nations. We should not “become too intimate with them; we get into trouble doing that,” advised the strategist who remained skeptical of NATO and other tight linkages (xviii). How Russia figured into Kennan's complex and contradictory feelings about intimacy is a pervasive theme of my book, not easily summarized here.

Kennan approached history as he did many things, with intense personal involvement. His two volumes of *Soviet-American Relations, 1917–1920*, published in 1956 and in 1958, were motivated by his desire for both a permanent appointment at the Institute for Advanced Study and respect from established historians.¹⁹ Hence he piled on the detailed archival evidence. To his genuine surprise, the first volume, *Russia Leaves the War*, snared almost every prize available. Kennan omitted from the published volume a revealing epilogue. Here he fantasized that if only the Americans who had been negotiating with Lenin at that plastic moment of early 1918 had possessed his gifts—diplomatic expertise, knowledge of Russian culture and history, and familiarity with Marxist ideology—they might have, if backed by Washington, achieved a breakthrough deal that would have altered the subsequent history of the Bolshevik movement and of US-Soviet relations.²⁰ While easy to mock and dismiss, this counterfactual is revealing about Kennan's boundless ego and his faith in diplomacy. Moreover, given the sad history of Russian-American relations over the past 105 years, we might be indulged for musing for a moment and asking, What if the mature Kennan *had* been negotiating in St. Petersburg in 1918?

Other elements of Stephanson's potpourri: With regard to religion, Stephanson is correct that much more can be done. Kennan's manuscript diary for his last decades are full of discussion of religion and theology, only a small part of which I included in the *Kennan Diaries*. I found it fascinating how Kennan on occasion tried to empathize about what God was feeling about this or that. So, too, can the future Kennan biographer delve into the Norwegian background and the personality of Annelise Sørensen Kennan. The story of Kennan the sailor also remains largely untold. My preface to this discussion of the reviews offers some observations on why Kennan remains a celebrated “‘sage’ of sorts.”

¹⁹ Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956); Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

²⁰ See Costigliola, forward to *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023),

As Stephanson observes, *Kennan: A Life between Worlds* treats the changing relationship with Gaddis as a key element in Kennan's last decades. As for my take on Kennan and other historians, I regard Kennan's judgments of David A. Meyers, Walter Hixson, John Lambertson Harper, and other historians as unfair and unwise (463, 495-97, 502-03). By putting all his faith in Gaddis, Kennan undercut his chances of being remembered as he so desperately wanted to be. In truth, redeeming that hope was a major motivation in my undertaking this biography.