

# Cultural Daily

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## Trapped by the Past

William Zinsser · Wednesday, May 11th, 2011



Last week, looking back on my first year as a blogger, I mentioned that the hardest column to write was the one that taught me the most. “No Second Act” (Feb. 4) was about the forgotten American writer John Horne Burns, whose World War II novel *The Gallery*, published in 1947 to great acclaim, made him briefly famous. Reading it then, I could hardly believe how closely Burns’s story paralleled my own coming of age as a young GI in North Africa and Italy. I still remember that gift with gratitude, and now I wanted to try to make sense of his short, disappointed life.

I had written about Burns once before, in 1990, when the Book-of-the-Month Club reissued *The Gallery* in a special edition and asked me to write a new introduction. Eager to give the members their money’s worth, I wrote a lengthy travel memoir and critical appraisal that I was quite pleased with. Now, for my blog, I thought I would just need to cut and reshape that earlier essay.

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