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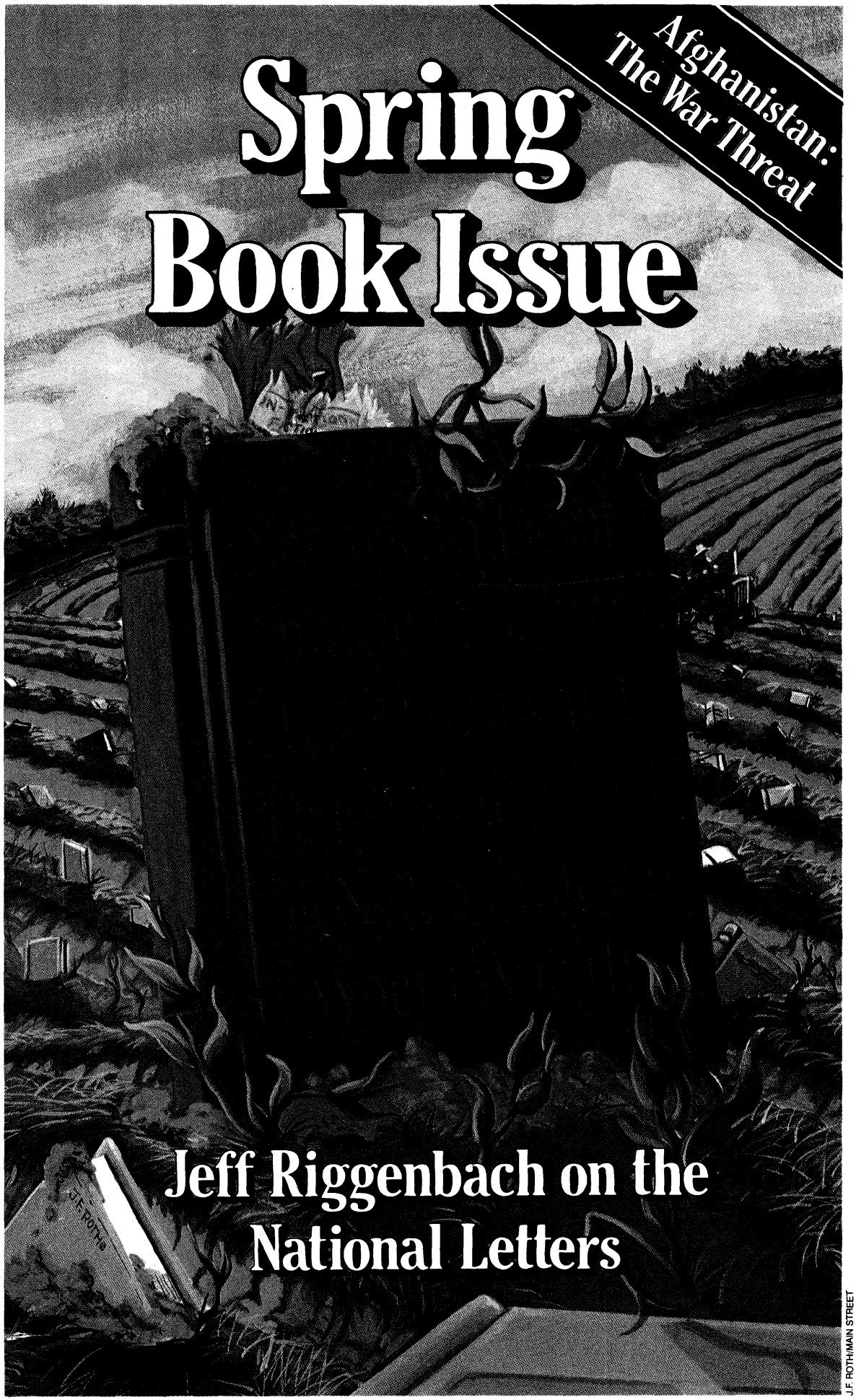
LIBERTARIAN

Afghanistan: The War Threat

Spring Book Issue

Jeff Riggenbach on the National Letters



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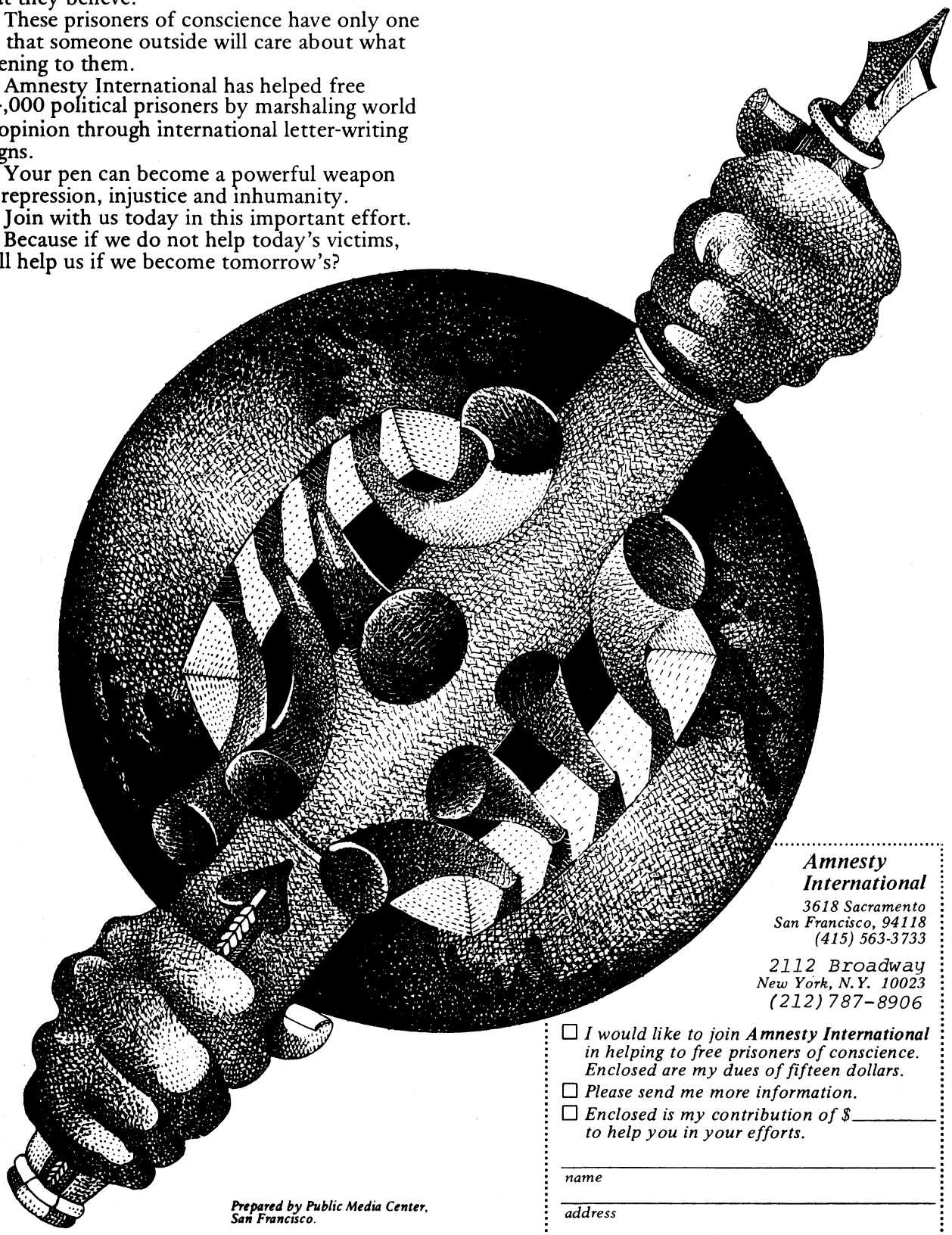

Prepared by Public Media Center, San Francisco.

Amnesty International

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San Francisco, 94118
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THE LIBERTARIAN REVIEW

March 1980
Volume 9, No.3

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Spring Book Issue

This month we review books on Norman Podhoretz, the Burger Court, the rewriting of history in American schools, Hunter S. Thompson, and World War III, while *LR* Editor Roy Childs examines the dangerous willingness of our government to fight for oil and "honor."

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FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

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EDITORIALS

AFGHANISTAN: THE WAR THREAT

THOSE OF US CONcerned with peace are now facing perhaps the most threatening and dangerous situation since World War II. We are faced with the very real possibility of a major war in the Middle East and Southwest Asia—possibly escalating into a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. For all those concerned with stopping this war before it starts, now is the time to unite and to build the peace movement of the 1980s. There is no time for handwringing; there is no time for anything other than a concerted effort to reverse American policies—policies supported by every major Democratic and Republican candidate today—which, if not checked and abandoned, will very likely destroy our civilization.

We can see how real the war threat is by considering only a few of the ominous events of the few days before this issue goes to press. On Friday, January 18, Carter Administration officials leaked to the press its likely response to the explosive events in Afghanistan. We speak not of trivial matters, such as the grain embargo or the threat to withdraw from the Olympics, but of the military actions which the Carter Administration is apparently prepared to take in the area surrounding the "arc of crisis" in the Persian Gulf region. According to the Associated Press, "If the Soviet Union carries its Afghanistan military invasion into neighboring Pakistan or Iran, the United States would have little choice but to oppose it militarily, top U.S. foreign-policy advisers are reported to have said. Such a war would almost certainly become a nuclear conflict because the United States has concentrated on its nuclear capability rather than on matching the Soviets' massive strength in conventional weaponry. That's what White House and national security officials are saying privately.... No Carter Administration official has discussed such a possibility on the record.... But ... the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, with the possibility of moves into bordering countries, has caused top U.S. officials to consider the ultimate unthinkable possibility: war with the Soviet Union. They are reported to believe that that's the only way the United States can protect its vital interest in the region that supplies oil to Western Europe, Japan, and this country."

The political and economic roots of this war threat are also clear: the *Baltimore Sun* reported on January 20 that

> The confrontation in Southwest Asia concerns oil most of all. Oil binds a whole series of strategic considerations. They range from the safety of American hostages in Iran to the purpose behind and the retaliation for the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.
>
> Security of oil supplies is the ultimate reason, though there are others, for President Carter's already sharp and still developing reactions to events in both Iran and Afghanistan. His leadership in the dual crises may determine his own political future and will shape international politics for years....
>
> Most analysts believe the president's commitment to a new approach, unprecedentedly militant in his case, must endure at least through the elections in November. Anything else almost surely would doom him politically and perhaps send the wrong signals to the rest of the world.

And so, because of irrational economic policies—in the main, government control of energy which appears to increase with each passing day—we stand at the threshold of a major war.

Whether the Carter Administration's threat of nuclear war was intended to intimidate the Russians—a dangerous and irresponsible act—or to intimidate and scare the American people into supporting stepped up defense spending and a new draft—a cruel immorality which will, once again, see American youth led into pointless slaughter—it is a dangerous gamble which must be flatly opposed.

To back up the war threat, President Carter, who is apparently prepared to out-hawk even the worst of the Presidential candidates—Reagan, Bush and Connally—announced in his State of the Union address on January 23 that he is asking Congress to authorize peace-time registration of draft-age youths, and a vastly increased U.S. military presence in the Mideast. Carter proposed a "NATO-like commitment" to the Persian Gulf region, and warned that a military invasion of the region would amount to an attack on "vital U.S. interests." The U.S. is now seeking to establish military bases in the Mideast, and intends to commit 100,000 men, 18 ships, six fighter squadrons to the region, to protect Western access to oil.

UPI

Afghani students in Tehran angrily attack the Soviet Embassy in early January to protest the USSR's intervention in Afghanistan.

We have repeatedly warned in the past that government control of energy and its interventionist foreign policy were leading us down the road to war, and devoted our special July/August 1979 issue entirely to the theme of "Energy and American Foreign Policy," calling for laissez-faire in energy and a noninterventionist foreign policy. The events in Iran and Afghanistan make that policy even more imperative if we are to avoid war.

It is no accident that the American establishment has reacted with such perverse logic to the vile Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. For more than a year now, alarm bells have been sounding: an attempt to bring back the draft, which initially failed, but now stands more than a chance of succeeding, the hostile reception to SALT II, demands for increases in our defense spending, and more. Powerful forces in this country seem determined to plunge us back into a new Cold War, and Afghanistan played into their hands perfectly.

This makes it all the more important that we not lose perspective — no matter how repugnant and outrageous we find the Soviet invasion. The Soviet invasion cannot by itself plunge us into war. The wrong American response could. The logic and wisdom of the noninterventionist foreign policy which we support in no way rests upon any Pollyannaish or benign view of the Soviet Union. In fact, the closer we look at what is happening in Afghanistan, the better noninterventionism looks. We must remember above all that the major wars of this century have not resulted from any conscious decision to go to war, but as the inevitable consequence of a series of mistakes, misinterpretations, and blunders.

What really is happening in Afghanistan? A thorough understanding of Russian involvement will do much to deflate Cold War rhetoric.

Because of its geographical position and its poverty, Afghanistan has always been strongly influenced, if not dominated, by its powerful neighbor to the North. The current drama, however, was set in motion in April of 1978. It was then that President Mohammed Daoud, a member of the old Afghan royal family, was overthrown and killed by the small, communist People's Democratic Party (PDP). It is worth noting that even before the left-wing coup, Afghanistan was firmly within the "sphere of influence" of the Soviet Union. The Afghan army was equipped almost entirely by the Soviet Union, and between 1954 and 1977 the country received about $1 billion in aid from the Soviet Government. The USSR was also Afghanistan's major trading partner.

The left-wing coup set up the PDP's Noor Mohammed Taraki as Prime Minister, Babrak Karmal as Deputy Premier, and Hafizullah Amin as Foreign Minister. The PDP was in fact a combination of two communist parties in Afghanistan — the Khalq (Masses) Party, and the Parcham (Banner) Party. Though they had squabbled and split in the past, both factions united to overthrow Daoud in 1978. Both factions favored close ties to Moscow, but the Khalq,

of which Taraki and Amin were members, was generally seen as more independent than the Parcham, of which Karmal was a member.

Moscow certainly had connections to the PDP, but it did not initiate the April coup. In fact, Western diplomats reported that the Russians were genuinely—albeit pleasantly — surprised by it. Perhaps it was because the PDP's entire base of support at the time of the coup consisted of about 5,000 urban intellectuals in an overwhelmingly rural country of 27 million. Why did the PDP make their move with such a narrow base of support? Essentially, they were forced to by President Daoud. In the Spring of 1978, Daoud started to crack down on opposition parties. In April, a major Parcham figure was assassinated by the government, and leaders of the PDP were arrested *en masse*. In order to save their own necks, the communists were forced to overthrow Daoud and assume power, with little popular support. The prematurity of the PDP's "revolution" is central to the events that followed.

As soon as they took power, the PDP moved quickly and brutally to staff the state apparatus of Afghanistan with its own cadre. Major opponents and most of the large royal family were executed, ousted officials were jailed, and the Army purged from the rank of Warrant Officer on up. Amin established a network of informers and secret police. For its part, the Soviet Union was happy to have a dependent and ideologically congenial neighbor on its border, while the Taraki regime, because of its weakness, was eager to win access to more Soviet aid and support. Soon Afghanistan and the USSR signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which established new economic and military ties. Several thousand Soviet advisers arrived in Kabul, the capital city, shortly after.

Yet, from the very start of its premature "revolution," the communist regime was plagued by internal factions, opposition and intrigue. After the "revolution" the country went through three purges in five months. The most serious took place in July — only three months after their rise to power—when the old struggle between the Khalq and the Parcham resurfaced. Taraki, Amin, and other Khalq leaders succeeded in elbowing Parcham members out of positions of power. Babrak Karmal, who had been the second highest figure in the regime, was demoted to Ambassador and shipped off to Czechoslovakia, where he went into exile. In the end, only three people with ties to the Parcham remained in high posts. It was not the last we would see of Karmal, however.

While the purged Parcham faction was closer to the Russians, the USSR seems to have favored the two factions reaching an agreement and working together, so as to consolidate the newly established communist regime and maintain its hold. Like the U.S. in Southeast Asia and Latin America, the Russian superpower attempted to juggle competing factions, being concerned primarily with "stability," so that its own interests would be secure.

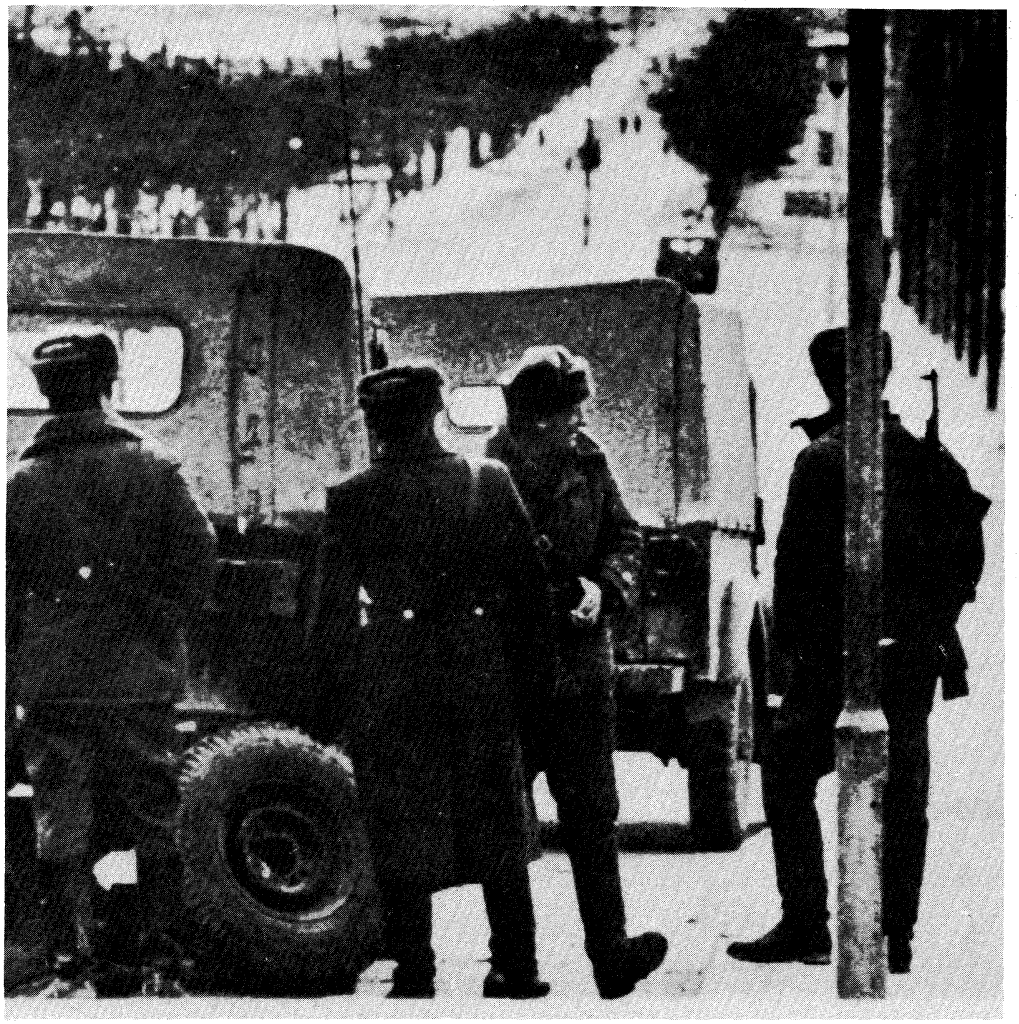
After purging its opponents, the Taraki regime embarked on a series of revolutionary reforms in the backward country—not all of them undesirable from a libertarian standpoint. But the reforms were always undertaken in a centralized, authoritarian manner that fueled resistance. The Taraki government initiated a land reform program giving 240,000 families full ownership rights to a piece of land. (Libertarians, of course, support land reform in feudal countries, as a natural outgrowth of our support for the acquisition of property rights through homesteading.) Yet, while turning the land over to private ownership, the government did nothing to supply seeds for the harvest, a service traditionally offered by the feudal landholders. Instead of a revolutionary reform, the land program ended up a disastrous disruption of the country's harvest, and had to be suspended. The regime had not earned enough support to challenge the power of the landholders. The government's attempt to improve the status of women ran into equally difficult realities. A worthy attempt to eliminate the bride price — essentially a form of chattel slavery for women —became a severe blow to the monetary income of the male-dominated Afghani tribal families. The Islamic mullahs, moreover, branded the emancipation of women a violation of Islamic principles.

Seeking to create the mass support it so desperately needed, the communist government instituted compulsory education, including adult programs, for Afghanis of both sexes. Conservative Muslims, who were highly suspicious of the regime to begin with, rejected the attempt at indoctrination. Many Islamic males revolted against the concept of educated women and mounted expeditions to take back their wives from the government schools. The government also tried to impose economic controls of various sorts on the nation, despite its long tradition of smuggling.

The typically Marxist attempt to impose a new social order from the top down also necessitated a police state, which weighed heavily on the entire country and cost the regime much support. Travel was strictly regulated, trade was subject to harsh military controls, and curfews were imposed. In the army encampments around Kabul, soldiers and government officials were slapped into jail at the merest suspicion of disloyalty to Taraki and Amin. Amin's secret police packed the cells of the terrible Poli Sharki prison with tens of thousands of prisoners. Three thousand of them were said to have been executed since 1978.

This combination of political repression, Islamic reaction, and the widespread perception that Taraki was "selling out the country" to the Russians fueled rebellion in Afghanistan's countryside. Afghanistan, the only country in the region that could never be subdued by British imperialism in the nineteenth century, drew upon its long tradition of resistance to foreign domination and took up arms. By August of 1979, substantial resistance had spread to 24 of Afghanistan's 28 provinces. Taraki's drafted army began to suffer mutinies, desertions and defections, while Taraki himself and Foreign Minister Amin saw fit to sleep in different houses in Kabul every night and ship their families to Russia. Soviet advisers, meanwhile, were often attacked and grotesquely mutilated in the countryside.

Then, on August 5, dissident elements in the army staged a full-scale mutiny in the capital city of Kabul. The mutiny was successfully put down, but the Soviet Union became concerned about its client regime, and urged Taraki and Amin to broaden their popular base. What had seemed like an easy opportunity to expand their influence over their small neighbor was turning sour,



UPI

Watchful, armed Soviet troops fix a flat tire on a Kabul, Afghanistan street.

and the example of Khomeini's Islamic revolution next door was enough to demonstrate what would happen if things were allowed to slip out of control. Rumors began to circulate that the Soviets were casting about for a successor to Taraki, one who could put the house of their troublesome new satellite in order. In September of 1979 a beleaguered Prime Minister Taraki visited the Soviet Union. It is possible that the removal of Foreign Minister Hafizullah Amin was on the agenda. Amin was commonly held to be responsible for much of the torture and repression carried out by the regime, and both Taraki and the USSR may have decided that such tactics were losing them support. Amin was also a more doctrinaire and hard-line Marxist than Taraki, willing to push ahead with his programs no matter what the consequences, despite Soviet advice to go slow and play it safer.

When Taraki returned, Amin beat him to the punch. He sparked a bloody shoot-out between his supporters and those of Taraki in the old Presidential Palace. When the smoke cleared, sixty people were dead, and one of them was Noor Mohammed Taraki. Amin went about erasing all traces of Taraki — on billboards, monuments, newspapers. Afghanistan had gone through yet another coup.

The Soviets dutifully telegraphed a message of support to Amin, but his accession to power was clearly a setback to them. No one believed in his ability to put down the rebels—Moscow's main priority. Immediately, Amin charted an independent course. He rejected Soviet advice to bring a negotiated end to the guerrilla war. He once refused to come to Moscow for talks. He demanded—and got—a different Soviet ambassador in Kabul.

The communist regime in Kabul was on the run. Ever since the April 1978 coup, it had been in accelerating turmoil; it had had to face the split between the Khlaq and the Parcham, plots and mutinies from the army, armed rebellion in the provinces, and finally, a bloody conflict between Taraki and Amin, the two lone survivors of the April "revolution." The regime was definitely weakened by the newest coup. The army's morale, already sapped by the never-ending political purges, began to deteriorate. The conscripted army suffered enough desertions and casualties to leave its troop strength at roughly half its original 100,000 men. Only Soviet arms, money and advisers kept the regime in control of the urban areas. The Russians had committed themselves to something they couldn't get out of. As reporter Gwynne Dyer of the Chronicle Foreign Service wrote,

> Afghanistan is not Egypt or Uganda. It is a country along the Soviet Union's most sensitive border. This time the Russians cannot simply write off their gamble and leave (as they did in Egypt and Uganda), for the spectacle of Soviet power being expelled by Islamic revolt could have a terrifyingly dangerous effect on the still-devout Muslim millions on their own side of the border.

The Soviets moved to put an end to the mess. On Christmas day, they began to airlift 5,000 combat troops into Kabul. Two days later, the coup was complete: Hafizullah Amin, his brother and a nephew had been summarily executed, and Babrak Karmal, the Soviet puppet purged by Taraki in July of 1978, had taken his place. With this accomplished, Moscow began to march tens of thousands of ground troops into Afghanistan. The Soviets, with at least 50,000 troops in Afghanistan, were ready to replace the desertion-decimated Afghani army and fight the rebels themselves, if necessary.

Hawks in the U.S. have portrayed the Soviet action as an act of ironwilled efficiency, a model of resolve to be juxtaposed against the "weakness" and "wavering" of a Vietnam-weary U.S. This, as a careful look at the progression of events shows clearly, is flatly wrong. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is not an act of strength, but a costly resort of desperation and weakness. It was the shaky

succession of client regimes in Kabul—not a plot to take over the oil fields—that led the Soviets down the slippery slope to full-scale war. The risks and costs of that war are very great—there is the blood shed, the money expended, the danger of sparking an Islamic reaction within their own borders, and the complete alienation of other Islamic states in the region. The USSR is not boldly calling the shots; on the contrary, events are controlling *them* in the classic imperialist pattern. As a former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Robert G. Neumann, said, "They literally had no choice except to take over the country or let it go. There was no middle way."

Let the Ambassador's statement ring in the ears of those who call for a "bolder," more interventionist U.S. posture in the Middle East. If we intervene, we too will almost certainly be faced someday with that same terrible choice: either take over a country, or let it go. A country that plays the game of imperialist domination *must* be willing and able to assassinate foreign leaders, pump in billions in aid to prop up client regimes, and ultimately, to send in troops and commit mass murder to impose its will. There is no middle way.

Have we forgotten, so soon, how much blood and oppression *both* sides of the interventionist dilemma actually entail? We tried to "take over" Vietnam—do we need to be reminded of the results? And we were forced to "let go" of Iran—after years of meddling intervention. Shouldn't these examples be enough to dissuade us from shoring up U.S. intervention capabilities in the Middle East? Or do we need to view the bodies of mutilated Soviet advisers and smell the napalmed Afghan rebel encampments to be convinced?

Ominously, a survey of the U.S. government's moves in response to the Soviet intervention makes it appear as if we are preparing for our own version of Afghanistan. The U.S. is cultivating client regimes in Turkey, Oman, Somalia, and Egypt in search of military bases. It is shipping millions of dollars worth of arms to Pakistan, and arms sales to Communist China are, one official said, "only a matter of time." The U.S. defense budget is being increased every year by 5 percent plus inflation. More and more politicians are becoming impatient with the recently enacted curbs on the CIA: in his State of the Union address, President Carter told Congress that "we need to remove unwarranted restraints on our ability to collect intelligence." The draft has raised its ugly head once again, and a special "quick strike force" for unilateral intervention is in preparation. Apparently, despite its expressions of shock and outrage over Afghanistan, the American government is so impressed with the operation that it wants to imitate it.

Of course, long after the flag-waving and chest-beating is over, the pitfalls that snared the Russians in Afghanistan—and the U.S. in Iran—will still be there. Oman, where we may soon establish a base, is a feudal monarchy that could soon be overthrown; will the U.S., like the Russians, get caught there in a long procession of client regimes with no popular support? Somalia is in the middle of a border war against neighboring Ethiopia—which is backed by Moscow. Pakistan is a repressive dictatorship, and any U.S. support for it will not only prop up its strongman, but is also likely to alienate Pakistan's ancient enemy, India. U.S. reliance on Israel as the base

for military operations is certain to enrage the entire Arab/Muslim world ... and so it goes.

All these elements of resurgent militarism — the draft, the strike force, budget increases — were being actively considered long before the Russians invaded Afghanistan; one is moved to suspect that the desperate Soviet intervention is being used as a pretext to bring out the militarists' heretofore hidden agenda.

The real issue in the Middle East is clear: how will this country react to the unavoidable decline of its post-World War II military empire? Will we disengage, relinquish the use of military force, and rely instead on free trade, open borders, and neutrality? Or will we repeat the mistakes of the past and push the world into war? Whatever happens, it was naive to think, as some of us did, that a machine as vast, powerful, and entrenched as America's military empire was going to slip away after Vietnam and Iran without a long and arduous struggle. The libertarian response to the growing threat of militarism must no longer be confined to single issues like the draft, or Iran, or Afghanistan. The times call for nothing less than the arduous construction of a new peace movement, a movement that can confront the issues of the draft, American foreign policy, skyrocketing government spending, the desperate need for a free market in energy, free trade, and arms control in an integrated, politically potent way. It is the tasks of libertarians everywhere — of the Libertarian Party and its Presidential candidate, Ed Clark, of Students for a Libertarian Society, and of everyone else — to lead this movement.

Milton Mueller and Roy A. Childs, Jr.

Guest Editorial

Gold fever

IN THE DEPRESSION OF the '30s, gold buyers went door to door offering to buy jewelry. Each buyer carried a bottle of acid and a file. He filed a nick in each piece of jewelry and applied a drop of acid. If it turned green, it wasn't gold. If it was, he'd pay $20 an ounce. And people were eager to sell. $20 was $20. Now, those $20 are worth about five, and the ounce of gold is worth about $600, a curious fact.

Why in the modern world, feeling itself terribly sophisticated about economics, is gold so enormously valued? Perhaps because it is the world's only convenient unit of value that cannot be manipulated by governments and politicians. If the prime minister is shot and a foreign puppet installed in his place, and government collapses, its money may be worthless the next morning; while gold is the only truly international currency, beyond the reach of governments and thus they cannot declare it worthless. Its price is set only by buyers and sellers and is subject to no law in any country.

Other properties such as real estate can be taxed or seized, but gold is easy to hide and hard to tax because it is hard to find. Around the world, it might be called the only real people's currency. And they see it as protection against disorder, worthless paper, government upheavals and political treachery. Probably gold now is over $600 an ounce because in today's world there is plenty of all of that.

—David Brinkley

(Reprinted by permission of NBC News.)

PUBLIC TROUGH

Of windfalls and bailouts

BRUCE BARTLETT

IN A REMARKABLE EXample of irony the U.S. Senate voted within the space of three days during the week of December 17, 1979 to impose a $178-billion tax on the oil industry for the "sin" of having made profits, while also voting to give Chrysler Corporation $1.5-billion in Federal loan guarantees for the "virtue" of having lost approximately $1-billion in 1979.

The Senate was, in effect, telling the American people and the world that profits are bad and losses are good. It was telling businessmen everywhere not to make investments which might reap them large profits or it would tax them away. It would be better for them to make bad investments which caused them to lose money, for then the government would come to their aid.

Such actions show an incredible misunderstanding of the nature of profit and loss in our economic system. When individuals make profits everyone prospers, for this means that they have found a better way to satisfy our wants, to supply us with necessary goods and services, and to make efficient use of scarce resources. In other words, the existence of profit is proof that more wealth has been created than consumed, and society as a whole is better off for it.

It is only the prospect of profit that gives people the incentive to find better methods of production and better products which can be sold for lower prices. And it is only the prospect of making large profits which encourages people to make risky investments in new technologies, to look for new supplies of scarce natural resources in unexplored areas, and to make large capital investments which may not pay off for many years.

On the other hand, losses hurt everyone, because this means that capital has been misallocated, that scarce resources have not been put to their best use, that someone has misunderstood the public's desires by producing goods it did not want at prices it would not pay. Losses indicate that errors have been made.

The market today is telling us that profits are to be made in producing oil and that little or no profit is to be made in producing the kinds of cars Chrysler produces. This means that people should be encouraged to find and produce more oil, while Chrysler should change its operations to produce and market different kinds of cars at prices the public will pay.

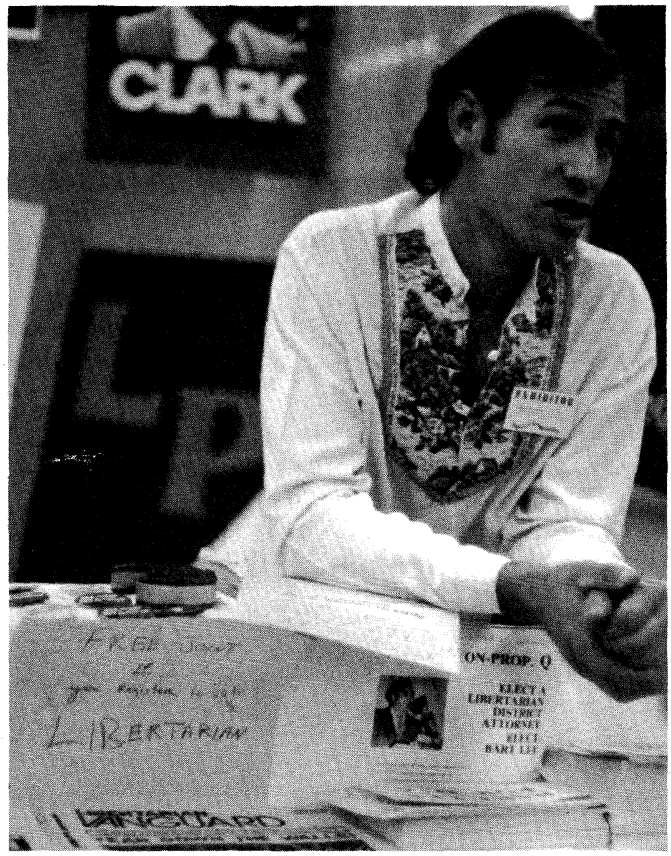
Congress is moving in the opposite direction. It is acting to discourage the production of oil, and it is acting to keep Chrysler in operation despite its errors. The

result will be less domestic energy production, greater dependence on unreliable foreign sources of oil, and higher prices, which in turn will exacerbate the present economic slowdown and reduce auto sales, making it almost certain that Chrysler will not survive even with federal aid.

The opponents of a windfall profits tax and a Chrysler bailout have failed as much as anything because they could not bring themselves to believe that such legislation was totally unjustified. Quite apart from the political pressure, many conservatives believed that Chrysler had a case for aid because the Federal government had so greatly contributed to its problems with irresponsible regulatory and tax policies. And they did not really believe that the oil companies "deserved" the massive profits which would accrue to them from oil decontrol. Because of their ambivalent attitudes the conservatives were unwilling to fight to the bitter end and caved in after exacting only minimal concessions. Indeed, the votes against both measures came as much from extreme liberals, who hate big business and thought the tax was too low, as from conservatives, many of whom ended up voting for both measures.

It is the final irony that Chrysler, of all companies, should have come to the government for aid. For many years it has been one of the very few big corporations willing to speak out against government policies on something approximating principle. Likewise, it is ironic that ultimate responsibility for the windfall profits tax probably belongs to our last Republican president, Jerry Ford, who had the power to decontrol the price of oil before he left office. Like so many Republicans, Jerry Ford knew the right thing to do but just didn't have the guts to do it.

THE MOVEMENT



LESLEE J. NEWMAN

JEFFREY SANCHEZ & ROY A. CHILDS, JR.

AS THE 1980 CAMPAIGN heats up, and the Republican and Democratic parties hold their first primaries, the Libertarian Party has scored a major triumph in the key state of California. On December 28, 1979, California Secretary of State March Fong Eu announced that the LP had finally qualified for permanent ballot status in that state. After more than five months of work, hundreds of men and women across the state succeeded in registering more than 92,000 voters as Libertarians, giving them a cushion of 21,000 over the required 71,000 registrants. Three of the most successful counties in the state were San Diego (4300), San Francisco (15,900) and Orange County, which brought in the astonishing total of 52,000. Special cheers from libertarians across the country should go to Jack Sanders in San Diego, James Skalican and Bob Costello in San Francisco, Jack Deane and Dyanne Petersen in Orange County, and to a single dedicated activist, Eileen Langenfeld, who brought in an astounding 5000 registrants on her own in San Francisco.

The success of this hotly disputed race for ballot status in California marks an important milestone for the Libertarian Party, and may well mean the end of ballot drives in one of the nation's most influential states. Henceforth, the LP only needs to receive two percent of the vote or better in *any* statewide race once every four years to stay on the ballot permanently. But California is a pivotal state for libertarians in another way: in 1978, Ed Clark, now the LP's candidate for President, ran a well-managed campaign for Governor of California against one of America's most popular political figures, Jerry Brown (and his inconsequential Republican opponent, Evelle Younger), and piled up nearly 400,000 votes, more than 5.5 percent of the total votes cast. That gave the LP visibility in California and across the nation, for it became clear that the LP was soon to reach balance-of-power status in elections across the country. With this threat in mind, the political establishment in California made every effort to block the LP from getting ballot status. It had forced Ed Clark to run officially on the ballot as an "Independent," despite his LP affiliation, and subsequently used that fact as an excuse to place the California LP in a Catch-22 situation: the LP couldn't claim ballot status, the Secretary of State said, because Clark had not been on the ballot as a Libertarian and, in turn, Clark *couldn't* be on the ballot as a Libertarian, because the LP was not ballot qualified! A veritable maze of court battles resulted, with every legal trick being used against the LP.

California libertarians decided then to confront the problem head on: to get the 71,000 registered Libertarians they needed to put an end to the manipulations of the State government. But as the registration drive wore on, the government showed that it was not finished with its harassment. One or two hired workers around the state had turned in fraudulent registrations and had been duly reported by the LP. The government saw this as a golden opportunity: it began leaking information to the media about alleged Libertarian "voter fraud," attempted at one point to call a halt to the drive completely, and, when that dirty trick failed, began threatening the libertarians who ran the drive with legal action. But they refused to cave in before these threats, and the continual harassment only increased their determination to shove more and more registrations down the government's throat. This they did in style.

The result is almost certain; the LP will soon be perceived by the national media

to be just exactly what it is: the biggest threat to the two party monopoly in a generation. LPC Executive Director Eric Garris is soberingly realistic about the meaning of this for libertarians, however. He points out that the LP could easily decline unless the party grows substantially in grassroots community support. "What is needed is to increase dramatically the level of commitment to activism on the part of Libertarians everywhere," he says. Garris points out that the LP hopes to field as many as 100 candidates in California in 1980, and that these campaigns could serve as an excellent means toward that end, if Libertarians will do the hard work that is needed.

While the excitement of the registration drive's success in California dominated the news for Libertarians at year's end, several other states had also achieved ballot status. By the end of January, 16 states had met ballot requirements: Hawaii, North and South Carolina, Idaho, New Mexico, Vermont, Nevada, Alabama, Utah, Michigan, Kansas, Iowa, New Jersey, Kentucky and Wisconsin. In other states registration drives are now underway, and it is expected that the LP will ultimately be on the ballot in as many as 45 states—far more than any other "minor" party. Most of these states already have plans to run full slates of candidates for state and local offices as well as for the House and Senate. Many of these local elections will have a significant impact by exposing the public to libertarian ideas for the first time. The growth potential of the LP during the next year is great indeed.

The crisis in Iran has stirred up harsh anti-Iranian feelings in much of the American public. There have been cries for war ("nuke Iran" has been seen on more than one banner) and calls for the expulsion of Iranian students from the United States. Libertarians across the country have leaped into the fray, opposing such blatant jingoism.

In Virginia, Republican legislator Warren Barry has proposed that all Iranian students attending all public colleges and universities be suspended. Fellow Virginian and veteran libertarian Eric Scott Royce has responded to Barry, accusing him of engaging in "the worst sort of racial stereotyping," and pointing out that many Iranian students are members of ethnic minorities within Iran which are very much opposed to Khomeini and the embassy seizure.

The major libertarian organization fighting Carter's order to deport Iranian students is Students for a Libertarian Society, under the direction of National Director Milton Mueller and East coast field coordinator Jeff Friedman. SLS has formed coalitions with a wide range of groups, including socialists and pacifists, and has worked to keep the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) off campuses. Libertarians, who believe in free movement of peoples everywhere and oppose both immigration and emigration controls, have thus taken the lead in dramatizing the cruelty of such arbitrary government power.

Jeff Hummell, SLS coordinator at the University of Texas, has written three articles for *The Daily Texan* discussing the United States' responsibility for the Shah, and opposing both military intervention in Iran and the deportation of Iranian students. With other University of Texas groups, SLS has formed CRIME, the Committee against Racism and Intervention in the Middle East, and has sponsored a rally against the INS.

The Board of Supervisors at Louisiana State University has considered a resolution to expel all Iranian students. But SLS coordinator David Cole has successfully lobbied the Board against this resolution and contributed several important anti-deportation articles to the student newspaper.

At Stanford University, Libertarians have mounted pressure which resulted in the campus administration's refusal to allow the INS to conduct interviews on the campus.

These and other people working on college campuses around the country have helped quell the racist and bellicose hysteria surrounding this unfortunate crisis.

SLS is stepping up its actions against the Carter-INS assault on Iranian students. The current issue of its student newspaper, *Liberty*, devoted largely to Iran, is now being distributed across the country. Copies can be obtained from Students for a Libertarian Society, 1620 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, CA 94111. Tel.: (415) 781-5817. The cost, in quantities of 25 or more, is 5¢ per copy.

Our readers might be interested in knowing that two important periodicals have recently become available in bound editions. Ayn Rand, now virtually retired from writing, has over the past two decades edited three publications, largely centered around her own political and cultural views. *The Objectivist Newsletter* has long been available in a bound volume ($12.50), and most of the issues of *The Objectivist* have been available individually as well. But Ayn Rand's third publication has, until now, been difficult to obtain. *The Ayn Rand Letter* was published from 1971 to 1974, a four-to-six page fortnightly which in the main consisted of "letters" from Rand on current events and important issues of the day. She eviscerated B.F. Skinner, pummelled John Rawls, pounded away at the Nixon Administration (all the while, strangely, endorsing him for reelection and calling herself an "anti-Nixonite for Nixon"), resoundingly upheld the "American sense of life," and in general defended her views like a swashbuckler. While some of these views will infuriate many libertarians and enchant others, all 81 newsletters are now available in a bound volume from Palo Alto Books, 200 California Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94306. The price is $29.95.

The other bound volume brings us the first full year of *Inquiry* magazine, published by the Cato Institute. That magazine began in controversy in 1977, and has since developed a richly-deserved reputation as a journal of high quality.

Its overall quality and originality are more evident than ever in this bound volume. There are articles on how the International Monetary Fund underwrites Apartheid, the secret diary of a Polish dissident, and why people secede from the public schools; there are defenses of Proposition 13 and assaults on government regulations and spending. Never before have these issues been looked at as *Inquiry* has looked at them. It's a different perspective on the political world, and it doesn't always work. But when it works, it makes *Inquiry* one of the best political magazines in the country, especially in the area of foreign affairs, where its coverage and insight have been matchless. The bound edition of Volume 1 is available for a mere $25 from *Inquiry*, 747 Front Street, San Francisco, CA 94111. It is a veritable reference work on political events. ❑

The National Letters

JEFF RIGGENBACH

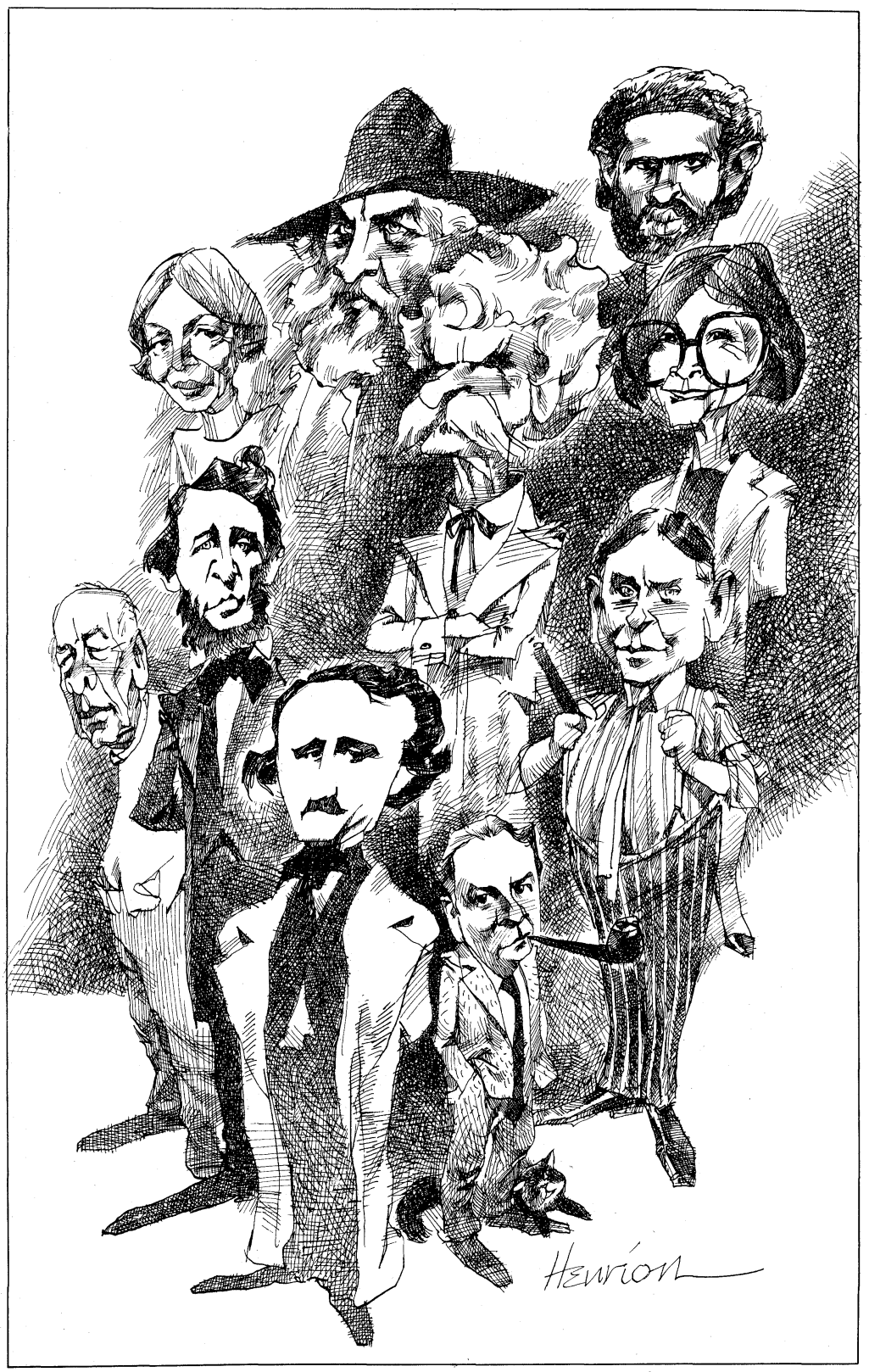
There is a serious problem here. Its outlines first became prominent on the intellectual horizon about two years ago, when John Gardner announced in his then newly published *On Moral Fiction* that "we are living, for all practical purposes, in an age of mediocre art."

"When one talks with editors of serious fiction," Gardner charged in April of 1978, "they all sound the same: they speak of their pleasure and satisfaction in their work, but more often than not the editor cannot think, under the moment's pressure, of a single contemporary writer he really enjoys reading. Some deny, even publicly, that any first-rate American novelists now exist. The ordinary reader has been saying that for years."

By the end of 1978, Gardner's lament had found its way into the magazines. "No previous decade in this century," Henry Fairlie declaimed in the pages of *The New Republic,* "has been so barren of anything in art and literature to which one might think of attaching the label of greatness." And as the last year of the '70s wore on, more voices were added, and more: "Traveling to Washington several months ago with a literary and theatrical agent who had left Germany in the 1930s and who had known both Brecht and Mann, I asked him why no American author in the past thirty years had written a major novel or play." Thus Lewis Lapham in *Harper's.* "We no longer live in a time of great writers.... When instead of Joyce and Mann and Proust and Faulkner, we have in our midst John Barth, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Gunter Grass, and—at best—Saul Bellow, it is understandable and not necessarily reprehensible that both readers and critics should turn to the literary past with a certain degree of nostalgia." Thus Robert Alter in *Commentary.* "There isn't much to read these days, and when something even semiliterate comes along, a kind of panic sets in." Thus Bryan Griffin in the *Atlantic,* in a piece on "the malaise of the novel" and how "some of us want desperately to be living in a great literary age" but are stuck instead with the one we're in. Even the dead have been joining in the chorus, with Lionel Trilling's newly reissued *The Liberal Imagination* in the forefront. "It is now more than twenty years," Trilling wrote nearly 25 years ago, "since a literary movement in this country has had what I have called power. The literary movement of social criticism of the 1920's is not finally satisfying, but it had more energy to advance our civilization than anything we can now see, and its effects were large and good. No tendency since has had an equal strength. The falling off from this energy may not be permanent. It could, of course, become permanent."

And to look around ourselves and survey the literary landscape is—how can one avoid it?—to agree. For who are

Beginning with Edgar Allan Poe at bottom, and circling clockwise around Mark Twain: Henry Miller, Henry David Thoreau, Ursula K. LeGuin, Walt Whitman, Samuel R. Delany, Joan Didion, H.L. Mencken and Raymond Chandler.


HERRON

our novelists who fare so poorly under the critical eyes now trained on them? A mediocre and undistinguished lot, to be sure: Saul Bellow, our latest Nobel laureate, goes on year after year passing off garrulous monologues (and an occasional barely retouched biography) as novels, and never managing to convey much of anything very definite or memorable except, perhaps, what it is like to be, all one's life long, a querulous, vaguely intellectual, prematurely old man. John Updike writes book club novel after book club novel, dressing up the monotonous unimportance of his stories in would-be fine sentences. Bernard Malamud muses interminably on what it is to be Jewish. Phillip Roth goes on interminably telling 200-page tasteless jokes. Truman Capote has become a professional talk show guest. And Norman Mailer has served up yet another generous slab of his idiosyncratic and ingenious journalism and seen it climb the bestseller lists in the "fiction" category by the simple expedient of asserting that it is a novel.

Our leading critics present no fairer spectacle, however. In the wilds of New Haven, Harold Bloom grinds out unimaginative gloss after unimaginative gloss on the idea (derived, it would seem, though without acknowledgement, from Ortega y Gasset) that young writers have to struggle to develop their own distinctive voices and avoid the pitfall of merely imitating those who have most influenced them. In Hollywood, Gore Vidal thunders curses upon all those dangerous novelists who seek to challenge their readers to active intellectual involvement with their fiction, rather than lull them with safe, predictable stuff like Mr. Vidal's own very popular novels—stuff which, like TV, requires no intellectual effort whatever to get through. And in New York, Irving Howe goes on ... the only word is pontificating. His latest book, *Celebrations & Attacks,* like each of its dozen weary predecessors, is fairly representative of his mind. And it may surely be said of it without fear of exaggeration that of all the unimportant literary events of 1979, the publication of this retrospective collection of Howe's pretentious discursions on diverse matters and occasions over the past 30 years must be counted one of the least memorable. Howe is the Irving Babbitt, the Stuart Pratt Sherman, of our day. Like Mr. Thompson in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged,* he becomes indistinguishable in any group of three and when all by himself seems to evoke a group of his own, composed of the countless critics he resembles.

It is surely a measure of Howe's remoteness from his own time that he devotes ten essays and more than a third of his book to the literature of the '60s, and expends not a word, not the barest passing reference, to Ken Kesey or Tom Wolfe or Joan Didion or Donald Barthelme or William Gass or Sylvia Plath or Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.—not so much as a passing reference, that is, to a single one of the writers who made the '60s the most fertile and exciting literary decade since the '20s. One writer of that earlier period, James Branch Cabell, used to refer jokingly to writing as "spoiling paper." In Howe's case, the joke is literally true. Yet Irving Howe is commonly held, by those who concern themselves with such matters, to be our most eminent critic, as Saul Bellow is held to be our most eminent novelist—for all that it may be said of them both as H.L. Mencken said of their counterparts of 60 years ago (and with equal justice) that "one never remembers a character in the novels of these aloof and de-Americanized Americans; one never encounters an idea in their essays."

The fact is, however, that we have agreed too soon with the fashionable literary doomseers whose pronouncements opened our discussion. Surely for any "common reader" who approaches our contemporary American literature with a mind free of preconceptions, the literary situation must appear altogether otherwise. For not only has the year just past seen publication of important new works by some of the leading writers of our era—new essays by Didion and Wolfe, new fiction by Barthelme, Vonnegut, Ursula K. LeGuin and Samuel R. Delany—but the past two decades have fairly surrounded us with fiction and essays of what would appear to be permanent importance. One thinks of *Mother Night* and *Cat's Cradle* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Omensetter's Luck* and *Dhalgren* and *The Dispossessed* and *The Word for World is Forest* and *The Dead Father* and *Play It As It Lays* and *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* and *The Underground Man* and *Naked Lunch* and *Pale Fire* and *Orsinian Tales* and *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* and *Advertisements for Myself* and *Genius and Lust* and *Against Interpretation* and *Fiction and the Figures of Life* and *The World within the Word* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *The Female Man* and *Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine* and *On Being Blue* and the *Diaries of Anais Nin* and the list could continue for a while longer, but the point's made.

Or is it?

For while any modern day "common reader" who set about compiling a list of notable contemporary works would probably end up with a list not unlike the one I have just offered, anyone associated with the current literary aristocracy of Howe and Gardner and Alter and Lapham and Griffin would raise very serious objections indeed to my modest list. Such a critic would very probably begin by disqualifying the entire second half of it as beside the point. The essay, he would point out, has been moribund, as far as any real cultural influence is concerned, since the days of Charles Lamb. He might even flatly assert, as Leslie Fiedler does in his well known study of *Love and Death in the American Novel* that "our national literary reputation depends largely upon the achievement of our novelists." And as for the novels on my list, fully half of them are the work of science fiction and detective novelists, a fact which speaks for itself.

The tale is told that after the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five,* his first successful book outside the science fiction field, Kurt Vonnegut attended one of those New York literary cocktail parties from which he'd ordinarily have been excluded before, and there met Jason Epstein, longtime Random House editor, founder of Anchor Press and cofounder of the *New York Review of Books.* It is said that Epstein listened to Vonnegut's name, frowned for a moment as though trying to place it, then, brightening, said simply, "science fiction" and turned and walked away.

And hasn't Ken Kesey been consigned permanently to oblivion by Morris Dickstein's finding that he is "offensive and overrated as a writer" and by Norman Podhoretz's description of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in *Breaking Ranks* as a "popular novel" of "mass appeal"? And surely everyone knows that one can't look for permanent importance in a Hollywood novel, even one as inspired as *The Day of the Locust,* much less one as popular as *Play It As It Lays?* This leaves us with a handful of more or less avant garde pieces by Gass, Barthelme, Nabokov and Burroughs, books which are, in varying degrees, either difficult or simply inaccessible for the common reader. Not much to show for two decades of writing in a nation whose literary reputation depends largely on her novelists, eh?

In the face of such an argument, what is one to say—except that apparently it is not American literature which is

Henry Miller

wanting, but American literary journalism and criticism? If the fiction of Vonnegut, Kesey, Delany, LeGuin, and Ross MacDonald is not literature, why isn't it? How is it exactly that critics, many of whom otherwise exhibit their keen intelligence and sensitivity on their every published page, should prove so insensitive to the literary talent—even, here and there, the literary genius—on display all around them?

In answering these questions, we will find ourselves posing other and much more fundamental ones. And this is as it should be. For if we wish to understand why the classic American literature in the making today is going largely unrecognized and unrewarded by the most demonstratively educated and even *literary* segment of the American populace, it is high time that we addressed ourselves to such fundamental questions. It is high time, in fact, that we did no less than reconsider our entire national literary history and our standards for judging what is of importance in it.

Perhaps the most fundamental of all the questions we must ask in the course of such a re-examination is also the best one with which to begin: What *is* a national literature? Librarians (and not a few literary historians) apparently believe it to be identical with whatever literature happens to be produced by whatever writers happen to be born in a particular country. Yet considerations of national origin are in fact less relevant than anything else in determining the national literature, if any, to which a writer belongs; Henry James and T.S. Eliot, both native Americans, are as obviously English writers as Ayn Rand and Vladimir Nabokov, both native Russians, are American. Moreover, as Van Wyck Brooks has aptly put it, "all kinds of writers exist in every country"; for the critic in search of a national literature, "the writers who are most interesting are those in whom the country differs most from others, in whom one feels the uniqueness of the country."

And this uniqueness, this national difference, is not a mere matter of geography. D.H. Lawrence loses not one whit of his Englishness by relocating himself and his work in Taos, New Mexico—no more than Henry Miller forfeits even a trace of his fundamental Americanness by basing most of his major works (and much of his life) in Paris and Greece. What makes Lawrence English and Miller American, what makes any distinctively national writer the kind of national writer he is, is rather more psychological and philosophical than geographical. "When one turns to any national literature," H.L. Mencken wrote in 1920, in the long, rambling, intermittently brilliant essay from which the present article derives its name, "one is conscious immediately of a definite attitude toward the primary mysteries of existence, the unsolved and ever-fascinating problems at the bottom of human life, and of a definite preoccupation with some of them, and a definite way of translating their challenge into drama. These attitudes and preoccupations raise a literature above mere poetizing and tale-telling; they give it dignity and importance; above all, they give it national character."

One might argue that, looked at in this way, Russian literature — and especially the Russian novel from Gogol through Goncharov and Dostoevsky and Turgenev to the early Solzhenitsyn—is preoccupied with the attitude that it is ideas—however they might be acquired, whatever might be their quality, be they mystically religious or rationally scientific—which motivate men and determine their actions. From the doctrinaire cynicism of Tchichikov, through the utopian indolence of Oblomov and the philosophical amoralism of Raskolnikov and the nihilism of Bazarov, to the bare, illusionless survival ethic of Ivan Denisovich, the characteristic obsession of Russian literature is that we are what we believe.

Similarly, one might argue that the English novel, as represented by Jane Austen, Dickens, the Brontes, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, Hardy, Lawrence, Maugham, Huxley, Mervyn Peake and John Fowles, is preoccupied with human social relations, especially those which develop between men and women, and those which obtain among social classes.

What then are the characteristic attitudes and preoccupations which distinguish American literature? I submit that they are basically three in number: the irreplaceable uniqueness, and therefore importance, of every individual in the world; the importance of individual political freedom; and the importance of individual self-expression.

Now, identifying American literature with a kind of individualism is not, in itself, particularly controversial. Even Irving Howe, who is careful never to entertain an idea until it has become commonplace, has acknowledged the fundamentality of the individualist ethos in American letters. In his essay on "Literature and Liberalism," for example he writes of Thoreau that "for most of his life, though apparently less so toward the end, he looked upon freedom as an absolute state of being, which might be reached by men who shook off the torpor of convention and penetrated the roots of self. He was openly contemptuous of those who saw freedom as an arrangement between authority and citizens that necessarily involved social constraints. His vision of freedom was asocial; except by way of preliminary it did not depend on collective effort or established government; it was a state of being that each man could reach for himself...."

And, says Howe, this "commitment to an absolute self-

For most of its history, the U.S. has been a literary colony of Britain.

hood [which] implies an antipathy not only to the idea of government but to the very nature and necessary inconveniences of liberal government" is not unique to Thoreau. "A somewhat similar pattern," he writes, "can be seen in major fictions written by Americans in the nineteenth century: Cooper, Twain, Melville." These fictions, Howe argues, concern "not the usual struggle among contending classes nor the interplay and mechanics of power, but a politics concerned with the *idea* of society itself, a politics that dares consider whether society is good and—still more wonderful question—whether society is necessary. These are the questions ultimately posed by the stories of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Huck Finn and Nigger Jim, Ishmael and Queequeq.... A literature that on any manifest level seems hardly to be political at all, becomes the one to raise the most fundamental problems in political thought: what is the rationale for society, the justification for the state.

"And if we agree for a moment so to regard nineteenth-century American writing," Howe continues, "we discover running through it a strong if subterranean current of anarchism. Not anarchism as it is known in Europe, but anarchism as a ... community of autonomous—one might almost say, Emersonian—persons, each secure in his own self .... [a community in which] the oppressive system of laws, oppressive because they are laws, gives way to a self-ordering discipline of persons in a fraternal relationship."

Yet uncontroversial though it may be to propose such a radical individualism as the *sine qua non* of American letters, to pursue that proposal to its ultimate conclusions for American literary history and for contemporary American literary criticism will prove controversial indeed. How could it be otherwise when such a pursuit of ultimate conclusions must lead to a dethronement, as it were, of certain writers we have all been taught to regard as Great American Authors, and to a promotion of certain other writers from their present status as popular hacks to a new status as major literary figures?

The first of these dethronements, properly enough, belongs to Cooper. For though Howe is exactly right in his identification of the essential spirit of nineteenth century American literature, he is, typically, wide of the mark in the group of writers he adduces to represent it. Twain represents it, and admirably, as we shall see. And Melville represents it —with reservations, as we shall also see. But Cooper? Far from being a distinctively American writer of distinctively American books, Cooper was merely the best known and most popular of the numerous imitators of Walter Scott who labored on this side of the Atlantic during the '20s and '30s of the last century. If today we remember James Fenimore Cooper when we have forgotten John Pendleton Kennedy and Robert Montgomery Bird, it is not because the saga of Natty Bumppo is any more finely crafted than those of Kennedy or Bird, or any more novelistically ingenious or intellectually meaty; but merely because it is more "accurate" in its local color—and, to that extent, cleverer in its adaptation of the Waverly formula to the setting of the American frontier.

Yet there is more to national character than geography and scenery, as we have seen, and geography and scenery is all James Fenimore Cooper has to offer us that is distinctively American. With regard to every essential of his art as a novelist, save only setting, he was a thoroughgoing and uncompromising Englishman. As Frank Norris remarked of him in 1903, "his heroes and heroines talk like the characters out of Bulwer in their most vehement moods, while his Indians stalk through all the melodramatic tableaux of Byron, and declaim in the periods of the border nobleman in the pages of Walter Scott."

Yet in this Britishness Cooper was quite typical of his age. Those of his fellow novelizers who were not busy imitating the historical novels of Scott were busy imitating the sentimental novels of Richardson or the gothics of Horace Walpole; and the best the fledgling Republic had managed to come up with in the way of a poet or belletrist—William Cullen Bryant on the one hand, Washington Irving on the other—were equally busy imitating still other English models (in Irving's case, stealing from his Dutch models outright) and laboring to build a literature which can only be called, not American, but Colonial English.

And the reason for this state of affairs was not far to seek. As far as the rest of the world was concerned, where cultural matters were concerned, America simply didn't exist. As Van Wyck Brooks writes, "How much the state of German literature before the Napoleonic wars resembled the state of American literature before the world-war epoch! Hear what Carlyle said a hundred years ago: 'During the greater part of the last century, the Germans, in our intellectual survey of the world, were quietly omitted; a vague contemptuous ignorance prevailed respecting them; it was a Cimmerian land where, if a few sparks did glimmer, it was but so as to testify their own existence, too feebly to enlighten *us*. The Germans passed for apprentices in all provinces of art; and many foreign craftsmen scarcely allowed them so much.'

"So Americans were regarded only the other day. There was a sounding-board behind European writers that carried their voices across the ocean, while American writers, facing the other way, faced a keen east wind."

"In the four quarters of the globe," Sydney Smith asked in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820, "who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play?" Even in America those of cultivation and learning displayed their good taste by preferring everything as European as possible and by leaving the unmistakably American to those too besotted to want anything better. This prejudice was systematically taught in the schools, both the lower schools and the leading colleges, both here and in Europe, throughout the last century. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, who attended Bryn Mawr at the turn of this century, has written that "American literature had no place in the Bryn Mawr curriculum—no Melville, no Hawthorne, no Poe, no Dickinson, no Whit-

H.L. Mencken

man. Henry James and Edith Wharton were the only modern fiction writers; expatriates, you see; and we read them for pleasure, not for study. When, ten years after my graduation, I told one of my English professors that I had discovered a genuine first-class work of American fiction, ... she looked at me skeptically."

Commenting on this passage in 1958, Van Wyck Brooks exclaimed: "How typical that was not only of Bryn Mawr but of Harvard and all our colleges fifty years ago!" But it remained typical far longer than that. Norman Podhoretz, the enormously powerful and influential New York critic who attended Columbia in the 1940s, reports in his 1967 memoir *Making It* that "in the context of the idea of Western Civilization to which I had been converted at Columbia ... America was definitely a minor province and definitely to be treated as such. Thus only one small survey course in American literature had been offered at Columbia when I was there, and I had not even taken it.... Why bother with things inferior, things parochial, when there was so much else of greater significance to learn?"

The situation in European schools was better—they began offering courses in American literature as early as the 1850s. But predictably, the only American writing they deemed worthy of serious study was that writing which imitated European models. "Washington Irving was used for language exercises in British schools," writes Sigmund Skard in *The American Myth and the European Mind,* "as he was everywhere in Europe: in 1855 the boys at Harrow decided by a formal vote that Longfellow was the first poet of the age. But these Americans were read as 'English' authors—anything else would have been regarded as ridiculous." Similarly, the young American collegians of Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's day considered the English Colonial Henry James and his disciple and imitator Edith Wharton the foremost "American" writers of their time. And the highschoolers of the same period were encouraged by the same parents and teachers who advised them to read Kipling and A. Conan Doyle to avoid Mark Twain, who was regarded as "vulgar." For the greater part of its history as a nation, the United States has been, as Poe called it in the early 1840s, "a literary colony of Great Britain."

And, as Mencken argued 60 years ago, the plight of the genuinely creative writer in such a colony leaves much to be desired. "Looking within himself, he finds that he is different, that he diverges from the English standard, that he is authentically American—and to be authentically American is to be officially inferior. He thus faces dismay at the very start: support is lacking when he needs it most. In the motherland—in any motherland, in any wholly autonomous nation—there is a class of men like himself, devoted to translating the higher manifestations of the national spirit into ideas—men differing enormously among themselves, but still united in common cause against the lethargy and credulity of the mass. But in a colony that class, if it exists at all, lacks coherence and certainty; its authority is not only disputed by the inertia and suspiciousness of the lower orders, but also by the superior authority overseas; it is timorous and fearful of challenge. Thus it affords no protection to an individual of assertive originality, and he is forced to go as a suppliant to a quarter in which nothing is his by right, but everything must go by favor—in brief to a quarter where his very application must needs be regarded as an admission of his inferiority. The burden of proof upon him is thus made double. Obviously, he must be a man of very strong personality to surmount such obstacles triumphantly. Such strong men, of course, sometimes appear in a colony, but they always stand alone; their worst opposition is at home."

So it was, certainly, in the United States in the fourth and fifth decades of the last century, when, in the work of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville and Whitman, a national literature first began unmistakably to emerge from the surrounding sea of epigones and hacks. The new literature was not entirely unwelcome, of course. Emerson had excited considerable sympathetic agreement all around the country when he had argued in 1837 in his famous lecture "The American Scholar" that it was high time "our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, [drew] to a close." There was even, here and there, a critic like James Russell Lowell, who not only went on favoring the new literature even after it had begun to emerge (as in his famous 1845 essay on Poe), but actually demanded more of the same. In his notorious "Fable for Critics" of 1848, Lowell excoriated the American literary public for displaying "the gait and the manners of runaway slaves."

"Though you brag of your New World," he wrote, "you don't half believe in it;/ And as much of the Old as is possible weave in it;/ You steal Englishmen's books and think Englishmen's thought,/ With their salt on her tail your wild eagle is caught;/ Your literature suits its each whisper and motion/ To what will be thought of it over the ocean."

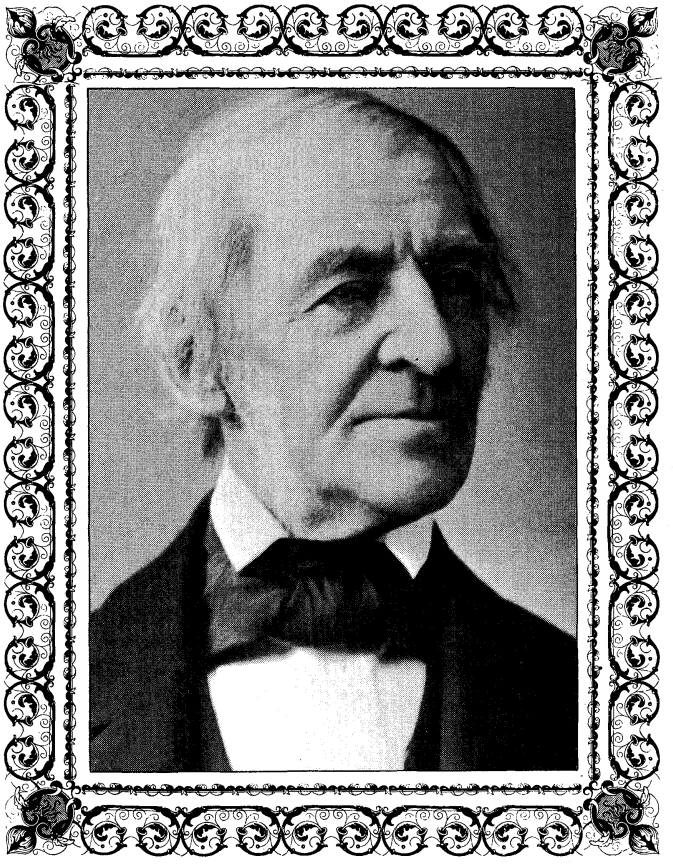
But most critics and educated readers of the American 1840s and '50s couldn't have agreed less with Lowell. If they had agreed with Emerson in 1837, their agreement had been purely theoretical; and it evaporated very quickly once the literature Emerson had called for began to materialize. Most ironic of all, but needless to say, they found the new literature wanting precisely in the degree of its failure to faith-

fully reflect the old—the English. "Neither Poe nor Whitman," says Mencken, "made the slightest concession to what was the predominant English taste, the prevailing English authority, of his time. And neither yielded in the slightest to the maudlin echoes of English notions that passed for ideas in the United States.... What happened? *Imprimis,* English authority, at the start, dismissed them loftily, they were, at best, simply rare freaks from the colonies. Secondly, American stupidity, falling into step, came near overlooking them altogether."

Poe, of course, never really ran any risk of going entirely unnoticed. But as Mencken argues, though "it is true enough that he enjoyed, during his lifetime, a certain popular reputation, ... that reputation was considerably less than the fame of men who were much his inferiors.... Not many native critics of respectable position would have ranked him clearly above, say, Irving or Cooper, or even above Longfellow, his old enemy. A few partisans argued for him, but in the main, as Saintsbury has said, he was the victim of 'extreme and almost incomprehensible injustice' at the hands of his countrymen. It is surely not without significance that it took ten years to raise enough money to put a cheap and hideous tombstone upon his neglected grave, that it was not actually set up until he had been dead twenty-six years, that no contemporary American writer took any part in furthering the project, and that the only one who attended the final ceremony was Whitman."

Whitman himself met with little better. "Nothing, indeed," says Mencken, "could be more amazing than the hostility that surrounded him at home until the very end of his long life. True enough, it was broken by certain feeble mitigations. Emerson, in 1855, praised him—though later very eager to forget it and desert him.... Alcott, Thoreau, Lowell and even Bryant, during his brief Bohemian days, were polite to him. A group of miscellaneous enthusiasts gradually gathered about him.... But the general tone of the opinion that beat upon him, the attitude of domestic criticism, was unbrokenly inimical; he was opposed by misrepresentation and neglect. 'The prevailing range of criticism on my book,' he wrote in "A Backward Glance on My Own Road" in 1884, 'has been either mockery or denunciation—and ... I have been the marked object of two or three (to me pretty serious) official buffetings.' 'After thirty years of trial,' he wrote in "My Book and I," three years later, 'public criticism on the book and myself as author of it shows marked anger and contempt more than anything else.'"

And the story was not far otherwise with Hawthorne or Melville or Emerson or Thoreau. Every one of these men consciously confronted the issue of literary nationalism, the issue of whether it was wiser to court popularity and critical acclaim by slavishly imitating the English or to risk literary ignominy by trying to capture a distinctively American flavor in his writing, and every one of them lost by his choice. Hawthorne endured penury and neglect for 20 years while producing, in certain of the short stories collected as *Twice-Told Tales* (1837, 1842) and *Mosses From an Old Manse* (1846), a distinctively American and original fiction. When, at the age of 46, finally, belatedly, he began producing novels in the approved English manner(s)—the first of these, a gothic historic with an American setting called *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) made his name and his fortune and the second, a gothic called *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), made both all over again—it is not difficult to guess his motives. He had been denying himself too long. Melville launched his career with a series of seafaring adventure tales in the approved English manner—*Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Redburn* (1849), and *Whitejacket* (1850)—and had achieved a not inconsiderable critical and popular following when, in 1850, he read Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* and became converted, so to speak, to American literature. The fiction he wrote after this conversion—including, of course, his great transitional work, *Moby Dick* (1851), although *Pierre* (1853), *Israel Potter* (1856), *The Piazza Tales* (1856) and *The Confidence Man* (1857),are in some ways even more genuinely American—destroyed his career in the space of a mere seven years. He who had been an established and popular professional writer found himself unable to support his family by his pen; he who had won the praise of all the critics saw his books go unnoticed and unreviewed. "Seldom," says Willard Thorp in his article on Melville in the *Literary History of the United States,* "has a successful author dropped so suddenly from his pinnacle of fame."



Ralph Waldo Emerson

The case of Emerson and his protege Thoreau is a more specialized one, but no exception to the rule. It is specialized chiefly in that it presents us with two bodies of work which must, for certain historical purposes at least, be thought of as one. Emerson himself did not want for popular or critical acceptance. As has been noted, he made a sensation in 1837 with his demand that America free herself from cultural and intellectual bondage to England; and from that time on, his fame and influence only grew. Yet, as Mencken has argued, his "reputation, to the end of his life, was far more that of a theological prophet and ethical platitudinarian, comparable to Lyman Abbott or Frank Crane," or, we might say today, Norman Vincent Peale or Billy Graham, "than that of a literary artist, comparable to Tennyson or Matthew Arnold."

Henry David Thoreau

This is partly because Emerson found it most congenial—and most profitable—to cast his ideas in the form of lectures, which he later reworked into essays; and it is difficult to think of anyone—save, briefly and meretriciously, Robert Ingersoll—who ever made a reputation for himself as a literary artist by lecturing. And, as we have seen, it is certainly characteristic of the American reading public of the mid-nineteenth century that it should have seized upon the strain of pious, moralizing English Puritanism in Emerson's work as its distinguishing feature and ignored the thoroughgoing individualism which made it different from anything being written in Europe. But if Emerson never did make a name for himself strictly as a literary artist, it is probably due at least as much to his actual defects as a literary artist as to his predilection for lecturing or to the superficial and Anglicized tastes of his audience.

Emerson lacked, above all, originality. There was a certain originality to his thought, to be sure, but it was intertwined and admixed to such an extent with the contemporary European ideas he turned to for inspiration that it is still difficult nearly a hundred and fifty years after the fact to clearly separate his own ideas from his inspired borrowings. And as a stylist he was, simply, undistinguished; for all their originality of structural conception and prose style, Emerson's *Essays* might almost have been written by any educated Englishman of the period. Almost. The Comtesse Marie D'Agoult said of the *Essays* that they were "not yet art," but added that "the mingling heretofore unknown, of the protestant spirit of individualism, or self-reliance, with the pantheistic spirit which inspires this book, the combination and harmonizing of these two antagonisms in a superior intellect forms, incontestably, a new element from whence may be born an original art." It remained for Henry David Thoreau to actually create the original art which lay tantalizingly nascent in Emerson.

Thoreau was twenty years old in 1837, when, as a member of the Harvard graduating class to which Emerson delivered his famous remarks on "The American Scholar," he first met the 34-year-old sage of Concord. He was already bookish, already independent-minded, already bent on writing.But he was yet unformed, and Emerson set about forming him. He moved Thoreau into his home, turned him loose in his library, introduced him to his circle of intellectual and literary friends, published him in *The Dial.* And though it wasn't long before Thoreau was being publicly dismissed as a mere Emerson imitator, he proved otherwise with his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), and rubbed the lesson in with his second, *Walden* (1854). Though he had learned his master's lessons well, Thoreau was his own man. He was a greater prose stylist than Emerson, a profounder thinker and a more original artist. In the *Week* and in *Walden,* the only books he published during his lifetime, he invented a new and distinctively American hybrid of the English essay form and established one of the four main currents or traditions in our national letters.

In the English essay from Bacon through Addison and Steele and Dr. Johnson to Lamb, Thoreau's contemporary, the emphasis is never on the essayist himself, always on his ostensible subject. It is the *sine qua non* of the essay as a form, of course, that its subject is always, if only implicitly, its author, his mind. "A personal essay," says Edward Hoagland, "is like the human voice talking, its order the mind's natural flow, instead of a systematized outline of ideas. Though more wayward or informal than an article or treatise, somewhere it contains a point which is its real center, even if the point couldn't be expressed in fewer words than the essayist has employed. A personal essay frequently is not autobiographical at all, but what it does keep in common with autobiography is that, through its tone and tumbling progression, it conveys the quality of the author's mind. Nothing gets in the way. Because essays are directly concerned with the mind and its idiosyncrasy, the very freedom the mind possesses is bestowed on this branch of literature that does honor to it, and the fascination of the mind is the fascination of the essay." But the mind in the English essay is typically outward-looking, extrospective. It not only avoids autobiography, it avoids even introspection; and it is really personal, idiosyncratic, *individual,* only incidentally, only in passing, only in the characteristic attitude—which never itself becomes an object of scrutiny—which it adopts toward whatever happens to be its subject matter.

The American essay created by Thoreau is another kettle of fish entirely. It is frankly, even relentlessly autobiographical; its subject matter *is* the mind of its author—its adventures, its experiences, its ruminations. Always the essaying self is the center of attention. The American essay created by Thoreau might well be described, in fact, as a kind of self-portrait in prose—except that one of its greatest and earliest practitioners, Walt Whitman, has demonstrated that it may just as well be crafted in a kind of prosy and loose rhythmed verse. And what more appropriate vehicle than this new kind of essay to give literary form to that individualism which is of the essence of Americanism?

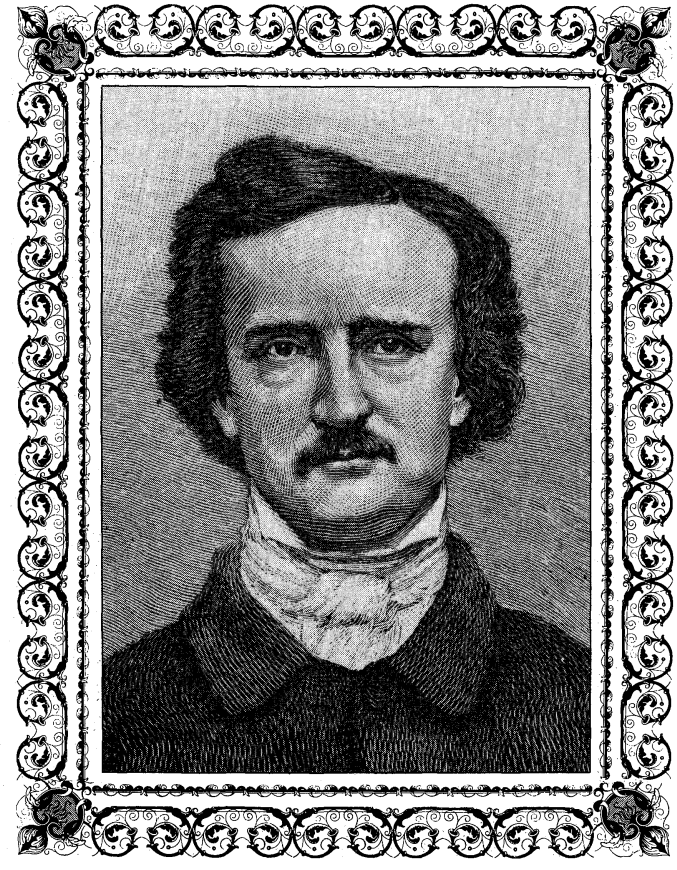
Yet, as we have seen, Whitman found no favor by writing such verse essays instead of imitating the officially admired English models, as Longfellow did. And Thoreau fared no

better with his essays in prose. "Thoreau's first book," says Townsend Scudder, "fell stillborn from the press. Of the thousand copies printed, most were presently returned to the author as unsalable." Because they were unsalable, his second book, *Walden,* went five years in want of a publisher. And when finally it was printed it was derided by Lowell, then the most influential native critic of letters, as the work of a man who had "so high conceit of himself that he accepted without questioning, and insisted on our accepting, his defects and weaknesses of character as virtues and powers peculiar to himself," a man who made "his own whim the law, his own range the horizon of the universe."

As we have seen, similar incomprehension greeted the work of Poe, when first that work saw the light of day in America. Yet, in his *Poems* (1831), *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), and the assorted poems, tales and essays he published between 1840 and his death in 1849, pieces like "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "The Raven" and "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe too created a new and distinctively American literature. Indeed, the remaining three of the four main currents in American letters may be traced directly to Poe: the science fiction tradition, the detective story tradition, and the symbolist tradition.

To begin with the last of these, it is widely acknowledged that Poe's writings were instrumental in launching the Symbolist movement in France—"French Symbolism....began," says F.O. Mathiessen, "at the moment when Baudelaire recognized in Poe's logical formulas for a poem his own half-developed thoughts 'combined to perfection'"; "Poe's critical writings," says Edmund Wilson, "provided the first scriptures of the Symbolist Movement"—but it is not commonly realized how great a role American writers have played in the subsequent development of the symbolist tradition, or how deeply and fundamentally American that tradition is. It is commonly believed that Poe gave the French the idea, whereupon Baudelaire, Mallarme, Gautier, Huysmans, Rimbaud and Valery carried out the rest of the necessary work for themselves — with a little help from such Irishmen and Englishmen as Oscar Wilde, George Moore, Walter Pater, Aubrey Beardsley and their various colleagues of the Yellow Nineties.

But the facts were far otherwise. Not only did Poe virtually found the Symbolist Movement, his American followers remained among its leaders from that point forward. The New Yorker Stuart Merrill and the Virginian Francis Viele-Griffin, both lyric poets, emigrated to France and assumed positions of Symbolist eminence in that country alongside Mallarme and Valery. They are regarded as important writers in France to this day. Merrill also produced one of the first English translations of the work of his French comrades, *Pastels in Prose* (1890). His classmate at Columbia Law School, Edgar Saltus, author of one the most genuinely '90s-flavored of the various personal memoirs of Oscar Wilde, remained in America for the greater part of his life (though he also traveled extensively in Europe), living sometimes in New York, sometimes in Los Angeles; his more than 30 books include novels of crime, luxury and decadence in a manner which derives about equally from "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", and impressionistic, poetic essays on mostly historical subjects, which derive perhaps most obviously from pieces like "The Domain of Arnheim." As Harry Levin has written of him in the *Literary History of the United States,* "When Saltus is recollected, he is sometimes regarded as an American disciple of Oscar Wilde ... Actually he parallels, rather than emulates, the English aesthete, who was his junior by a year. In *Love and Lore* (1890), a year before the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Saltus defended fiction against the prudishness of Anthony Comstock by recognizing only two kinds: 'stories which are well written and stories which are not.' Two years before *Salome* he had touched upon the same subject ..." He paralleled Wilde too in his cultivation of the art of the epigram.



Edgar Allan Poe

And Saltus was by no means alone in thus remaining in America while carrying forward the symbolist tradition of Poe. He had his forerunners in the weirdly ornate fables of the early Hawthorne and the later Melville, and his contemporary counterparts in Ambrose Bierce of San Francisco, who combined a passion for epigram and paradox with a zest for telling tales of strangeness and murder; in Lafcadio Hearn of New Orleans, for whom exotic places loomed as large and as central as they did for Rimbaud; in the Chicago based editors and publishers of *The Chap Book,* which anticipated the better known English *Yellow Book* in most of its famous symbolist heresies; and in his fellow New Yorker, James Gibbons Huneker, whose critical essays on the arts for various New York newspapers won him the friendship and professional respect of the greatest of French symbolist critics, Remy de Gourmont.

And to say all this is to say nothing of the role played by Americans in the Yellow English Nineties of Wilde, Beerbohm and Beardsley. The doctrine of art for art's sake which vitalized that famous decade was definitively formulated, not by Wilde or his Oxford mentor Walter Pater or even by

Joan Didion

Arthur Symons, but by the American James McNeill Whistler in his "10 o'Clock" lecture of 1885. *The Yellow Book,* which launched Beerbohm and Beardsley and ultimately lent its name and color to the entire decade, was edited by the American, Henry Harland. Even more important than Harland however, was Frank Harris, the American who went to London and became, in John Dos Passos's words, "the center of the literary nineties." As editor of *The Fortnightly Review* and *The Saturday Review,* "he discovered H.G. Wells ... launched Shaw as a drama critic ... encouraged Max Beerbohm ... published Swinburne and Oscar Wilde and Beardsley."

But showing that symbolism was invented by an American and that its subsequent development was undertaken or overseen in the main by Americans is not the same as showing that symbolism is an American tradition in the sense with which we began: it is not the same as showing that symbolism is an individualistic tradition. In the case of the Thoreauvian tradition of the confessional essay such a demonstration is presumably unnecessary. The Thoreauvian essay is, as we have seen, preoccupied with the self of its author, with the qualities in virtue of which he is unique and *individual;* this is evident in Thoreau himself and in such of his best known successors as Whitman, Twain, Henry Adams, Mencken, Henry Miller and Joan Didion. But the individualism of the Thoreauvian tradition also extends beyond the purely personal to the level of more or less explicit social philosophy. One of Thoreau's most famous essays is the one on "Civil Disobedience" in which he declares his acceptance of the slogan, "That government is best which governs not at all," and further asserts that "we should be men first and subjects afterwards. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right." For "government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not settle the West. *It* does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way." Twain sneered that "there is no native American criminal class except Congress." Mencken asserted that all forms of government are "inordinately wasteful, extravagant, dishonest, ... all alike are enemies to laborious and virtuous men." And Didion was recently (and not unjustly) labelled a "libertarian" by a seemingly shocked *Time* magazine reviewer because she devoted an essay in her latest book, *The White Album,* to the government "Bureaucrats" who take it upon themselves, out of an "impenetrable sense of higher social purpose," to rearrange other people's daily lives for them.

Obvious though it may be that the Thoreauvian tradition in American letters is individualistic, however, it is perhaps less than obvious that the symbolist tradition of Poe and his successors is equally individualistic—individualistic to its very core. Yet listen to Remy de Gourmont: "What does symbolism mean?" he asked in 1896, and answered himself: "individualism in literature, liberty in art, the abandoning of the formulae of the schools, the tendency toward whatever is new, strange, even bizarre." And what do tendencies toward the strange and bizarre have in common with individualism? Simply this: the symbolist writer, like the confessional essayist, is preoccupied with his unique self as the basic subject matter of his work; and the more unique and individual his work is, the better it can serve to symbolize his own uniqueness.

"The capital crime in a writer," says Gourmont, "is conformity, imitation, submission to rules and teachings. The work of a writer should be not only the reflection but the enlarged reflection of his personality. The only excuse that a man has for writing is that he express his own self, that he reveal to others the kind of world that is reflected in his individual mirror; his only excuse is that he be original...." Or, as Poe put it in his 1847 essay on Hawthorne, "in one sense and in great measure, to be peculiar is to be original, and than the true originality there is no higher literary virtue."

In pursuit of such originality, not a few writers have gravitated toward science fiction—a genre characterized by the freedom of its writers to dream up literally anything they like in the way of fictional worlds and fictional events. The science fiction writer, like the symbolist writer, is unconstrained by the facts of the real world. He is free to create a world of his own, a world which, like his individual self, is unique and unprecedented.

According to H. Bruce Franklin, Poe was first called "the father of science fiction" in an unsigned 1905 essay in *The Saturday Review.* And he has been called it many times since. The only writer who might reasonably seem to have a prior claim is Mary Shelley, whose *Frankenstein* (1818) preceded the earliest of Poe's science fiction tales by more than fifteen years. Yet the Shelley book is less a breakthrough into a new genre than an ingenious insertion of pseudo-science into an old one—namely, the gothic novel. In tales like "The Unparalleled Adventures of Hanns Pfaal," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," and "Mellonta Tauta," Poe invented something altogether different—a sort of pseudo-scientific romance which owes little or nothing to Horace Walpole

and Ann Radcliffe. And, as was the case with his poems, tales and essays in the symbolist manner, he created an important American literary tradition in the process. H. Bruce Franklin has shown in *Future Perfect* that science fiction, as we now call it, is "somewhere near the center of nineteenth-century American literature." Hawthorne wrote it; Melville wrote it; Twain and Bierce and Jack London wrote it. And well they might have, for science fiction was uniquely equipped among literary forms to deal imaginatively with the principal fact of nineteenth century American life—the industrial revolution.

Uniquely equipped as science fiction was, however, another distinctively American genre—the detective story—undertook a related task: the imaginative depiction of the quasi-ommipotent scientist-inventor who made the industrial revolution possible. As D.F. Rauber has observed in his recent essay on "The Role of the 'Great Detective' in Intellectual History," "the 'great detective' can be seen as a vulgarization of the scientist, a popular surrogate for the less glamorous figure of the austere investigator of nature. Like the scientist, the detective collects data, forms hypotheses, checks these by the equivalent of experiment, and reaches conclusions through a combination of observation and logic. Indeed, at bottom the 'great detective' is a fantasy figure of the perfectly functioning mind, pure intellect proceeding inexorably onward, indifferent to, or rather oblivious of, emotional consideration. But on a larger cultural scale this is also the ideal of the scientist, partially as viewed by the scientists themselves and partially as the scientist is apprehended by the outside world. This type of fantasy figure does not appear in literature until after the emergence of modern experimental science...."

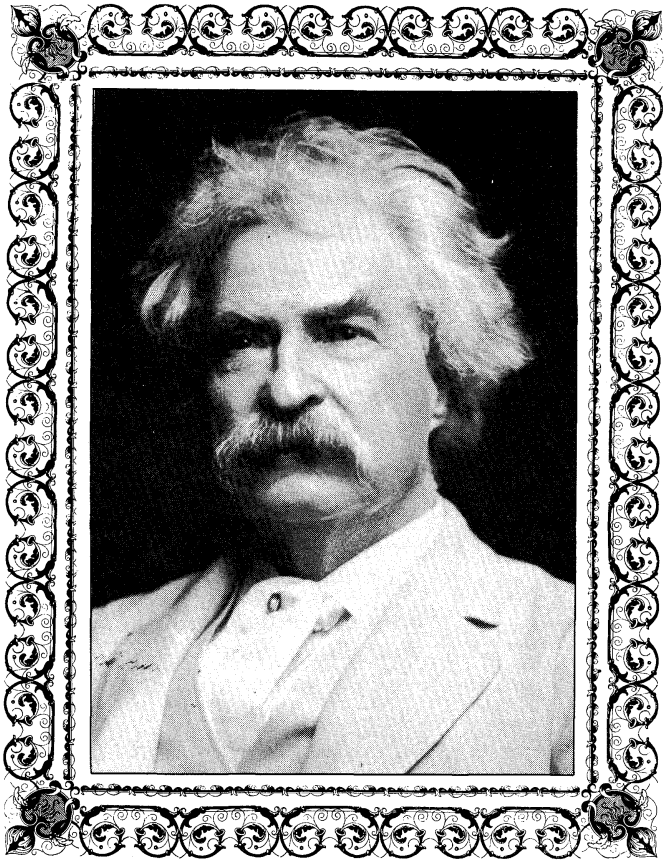
As everyone knows, Poe was the inventor of the great detective (in his famous tales of the exploits of Auguste Dupin), and it should therefore come as no surprise that the detective tradition is no less inherently individualistic—albeit for a different reason—than those other children of Poe's, the symbolist and science fiction traditions. The difference is that while symbolist works and works of science fiction are inherently individualistic in virtue of their stress on imaginative uniqueness, detective stories are inherently individualistic in virtue of certain of their basic plot conventions.

These conventions are apparent enough in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," but they are particularly obvious in the later "hardboiled" detective stories of Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald. The detective in such stories is almost always an individual operative, almost never an employee of an organization. He sells his services, if at all, to individuals, not to organizations. He confronts, typically, not counterfeiters or corrupt politicians or corporate embezzlers—criminals whose victims are groups (stockholders, taxpayers, or society as a whole)—but rather murderers, whose victims are, inevitably, individuals. He is is invariably an eccentric, highly *individual* personality—from Poe's Dupin, who never opens his shutters and goes out only at night, to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes with his cocaine and his violin, to John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee with his houseboat and his calculated effort to work as little as possible, so as to enjoy his retirement while still young enough to do so. And the police in these stories are often portrayed as bumbling fools, often as dedicated professionals hamstrung by regulations, often as criminals in their own right—but almost never as capable enough to solve the murder without the aid of the individual detective.

Raymond Chandler

Detective fiction, science fiction, symbolism and the confessional essay — *these* are the main currents in America's national literature. All distinctively American fiction writers derive from Poe. All distinctively American essayists derive from Poe and from Thoreau. And all distinctively American writers have, from the time of their first appearance nearly a hundred and fifty years ago down to this very day, met with incomprehension and neglect at the hands of native critics and professors of literature; for these latter have always been convinced that Europe maintained a kind of monopoly on excellence in the literary arts, and have always judged all American writing by European standards.

Perhaps the most representative case of this problem in all of American literary history is that of Mark Twain. Twain invented no genres, but tried his hand at every one of those created by Poe and Thoreau—the confessional essay in *Life on the Mississippi, Roughing It* and his travel books; science fiction in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthurs's Court;* detective fiction in *Pudd'nhead Wilson;* symbolism in *The Mysterious Stranger* and in his masterpiece, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Twain's great originality as an American writer lay in his perfection of a new prose style, a style at once colloquial, plain spoken and magnificently expressive. And his great contribution to the development of American fiction lay in having proved, with *Huck Finn,* that a symbolic fantasy as sensuous and strange and individual as anything by Poe himself could be made to look on its surface like a straightforward realistic novel. Twain showed that the supernatural—or even the atmosphere of the supernatural—was no more es-



Mark Twain

sential to the symbolist writer than was an elaborately ornate and "literary" prose style.

This is no small achievement. It might even reasonably be argued that in demonstrating the possibility of a realistic, vernacular symbolism, Twain launched one of the most important subgenres within the American symbolist tradition—the hardboiled fantasy of crime, violence, and life under primitive conditions. The first masters of this kind of writing after Twain were Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Jack London; its most important later masters were Hemingway, Horace McCoy (author of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?)* and James M. Cain. And for launching this subgenre, how did Twain fare at the hands of native critics and professors of literature? At this point in the argument, I trust there is no longer any need to answer the question explicitly.

Yet one answer needs to be made, if we are to see why Twain's case is such a representative one: his books, and those of almost all of his followers from Crane to Cain, were not rejected by native critics and professors on the open and clearly specified ground that they were insufficiently European, but rather on the ground that they were inherently sub-literary, that they were not serious books at all, but merely works of "popular entertainment." No American writer has ever been shunned explicitly because he was too American in his manner: other, more publicly respectable rationalizations have always fallen easily enough to the hands of our critics and professors. Thoreau was not called to task for being too American, but for being too self-centered; and this has continued to be the standard charge levelled against Thoreauvians from Walt Whitman through Henry Miller to Joan Didion (who was attacked only the other day in *The Nation* because "her subject is always herself"). The charge of committing mere popular entertainment when one ought to be doing serious (which is to say European) work has been much more widely used in American literary history than the charge of self-centeredness, however. It has been used from the days of Poe himself to discredit the work of science fiction writers and detective story writers, and also, as we have seen, to discredit the work of the hardboiled symbolists. It is therefore worth digressing for a few paragraphs to cast this distinction between the "popular" and the "serious" in literature in a somewhat clearer light.

Until around 1750, there were two kinds of imaginative writers in Western Europe. There were court poets, by which I mean that entire class of writers who lived on pensions given them by members of the upper class, which is to say, the nobility, the State. And there were the mostly anonymous authors of what we know today as ballads, folktales and Mother Goose rhymes—they didn't make a living doing that, of course; they were farmers and blacksmiths, and, common sense might seem to suggest, a good many, perhaps even a majority, were housewives. Some of them, the unknown authors of "Cinderella" and "The Sleeping Beauty," for example, were creative geniuses. But they were also members of the lower class and as such, in the eyes of the upper class, they were inferior—inferior in every respect, inherently and inescapably inferior—and so were incapable of producing literature which was not inferior to the literature produced by their betters.

But by 1750 the phenomenon known to history textbooks as the "rise of the middle class" had pretty well taken place. In the mid-eighteenth century there were no longer only two social classes; there were three. The old upper class had dwindled sadly in both size and real wealth and political power. And the new middle class found itself in the position of chief patron of the literary arts. Moveable type was by then a several hundred years old invention, and specimens of a new literary form called the novel, invented to utilize the mass production possibilities of Gutenberg's miracle, had begun to appear.

Now the new middle class tried to equal or surpass the old upper class in every respect—wealth, "conspicuous consumption," political power, patronage of the arts, *and exclusivity.* As the old upper class had dismissed folk literature as "vulgar" and for centuries had refused even to read literature written in the language of common people, so the new middle class sought a method of justifying contempt for the literature of the still existent, but increasingly literate and monied lower class. In the just pre-modern world of 1750, books were becoming available to elements which had never seen them before, and the new middle class ran the risk, so to speak, of liking the same books as those liked by literate servants and laborers. And this risk was a particularly real one in the case of the novel, that new form which seemed to win favor among readers of all sorts and to be written by writers of all sorts, even those who had previously had no recourse to print and therefore *told* their stories. It was becoming impossible to distinguish the work of these writers from the work of their betters. As Leslie Fiedler writes in his 1975 essay, "Towards a Definition of Popular Literature," "Believing in the division of labor in all fields, [the bourgeoisie] appointed experts to tell them (to 'brief' them, we would say these days) whether novels were O.K. in general; and if so, which were more O.K. than others.

Critics dismiss as "popular" the most distinctively American books.

"Obviously, they did not always take the good advice they sought. Quite often, in fact, they continued to read what their critical mentors had taught them to regard as 'trash.' But they did snatch such work from the hands of their children, especially their daughters, when they caught them reading it. In the light of this, it is clear that the function of modern critics and schoolmasters whose subject is literature was from the start rather like that performed by the writers of Etiquette Books, Dictionaries and Grammars. Like the latter, the former responded to the cultural insecurity of the eighteenth century middle classes by providing 'rules' or 'standards' or guides to 'good behavior.' The new rich wanted to know which fork to pick up; how to spell things 'right;' when, if at all, it was proper to say 'ain't'; and also what books to buy for display in their libraries or on their coffee tables."

Of course, the advice they got from their experts varied as the experts themselves varied. Some announced that only the books of morally good men were O.K. Others recommended only books whose authors were dead or whose authors were living imitators of the dead. Still others advised against all novels, a form which they considered inherently vulgar. (And all these standards have endured into our own era. It is only a few years since the late Yvor Winters was arguing that only books whose implications are morally good may be considered artistically successful. It is only since World War II that a majority among critics and professors of literature have come to regard the novel as an artistic genre with as much potential as poetry to be "serious" and "important" and "elevating." A significant number still believe otherwise.)

In America, as we have seen, the critics and professors have traditionally advised against books which did not resemble European ones; and they have thus dismissed as "popular" all of the most distinctively American books in the history of our national letters. Yet, as Fiedler argues, "popular literature is not, as a category, a type, a subgenre, the invention of the authors of the books which we have been taught to believe 'belong' to it, but of certain theorizers after the fact. It exists generically in the perception of elitist critics—or better, perhaps, in their misperception, their—usually tendentious, sometimes even deliberate—misapprehension. It will, therefore, cease to exist as a category when we cease to regard it in the way we have been misled into doing. Clearly, what we consider 'serious novels' or 'art novels': works, say, by Henry James or Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann or James Joyce, are indistinguishable, *before the critical act,* from 'best-sellers' or 'popular novels' by Jacqueline Susann or John D. MacDonald, Conan Doyle or Bram Stoker. Despite peripheral attempts to sort them out before the fact by invidious binding or labelling, by and large, they are bound in the same boards and paper; edited, printed, distributed, advertised and peddled in quite the same way."

Of course, Fiedler's argument is not persuasive to everyone. American critics and professors of literature are helplessly bound by tradition, and tradition demands that a clear, unequivocal and unbridgeable distinction be drawn between the serious and popular in literature, and that the latter be firmly and unequivocally rejected. America's critics and literary pedants have done this traditionally, and they are doing it today. Norman Podhoretz, who was named a few years ago by Richard Kostelanetz as one of the four most powerful members of the New York literary aristocracy, made his early reputation with essays like "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," in which he excoriated the Beat writers Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg —arguably the most important American literary figures of the '50s, creators of a uniquely twentieth century version of the Thoreauvian-Whitmanesque confession—for their "self-centeredness" and "self-indulgence." Now, from his pinnacle of influence, he tells us out of one side of his mouth that Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is merely popular entertainment, and out of the other that the critical tradition to which he conceives himself as belonging takes "its bearings not from any American tradition of letters ... but from heavier modes of critical discourse which could be traced to France or Germany or Russia."

This quotation is taken from Podhoretz's 1967 memoir *Making It,* in which he thus further describes the intellectual tradition he considers his own: "... it was mainly on Europe that the family [the New York literary aristocracy of the 1950s] had its eyes. There were so many people there who would in the coming years be revealed as relatives—Orwell, Koestler, Spender, Merleau-Ponty, Silone, and a dozen others—and so few outside the family proper in America itself. The terms in which the family discussed things, the language it spoke, was a language that seemed to make more sense to European than to American ears; the books which were the family's touchstones and the issues it considered relevant all had greater currency in Europe than in America; and the ideas and tastes to which the family was attached constituted an ambience suggesting Paris rather more than it did New York (New York, appropriately enough, was the *New Yorker* crowd at the Algonquin Round Table, with one foot on Broadway and another on the best-seller lists). Thus, when the family spoke of itself or was spoken of as 'alienated,' the reference might be to any number of things, but the deepest thing of all was this; *They did not feel that they belonged to America or that America belong to them"* (emphasis in the original).

Podhoretz tells us that he himself felt this way, as a student in the '40s, as a journeyman writer in the '50s, and even in the early '60s after he had become one of the leaders of the establishment. "Upon Johnson's accession to the Presidency," he writes, "I was asked, as one of six 'intellectuals,' to write a letter outlining the things I would like to see him do. I have never had so much trouble writing

anything, and in the course of working on the letter I came to realize that the trouble stemmed from feelings of alienation from the country of my birth so deep that I could not even overcome them when they were decreed away from me personally by the President of the United States himself. By 'alienation' in this context I meant simply the feeling that this was not *my* country; I was not really a part of it; I was a citizen, and a highly interested one, of a small community in New York which lived by its own laws and had as little commerce as it could manage with a hostile surrounding environment."

Podhoretz's colleague among the top leaders of our current literary aristocracy, Irving Howe, who discusses American writing of the '50s, '60s and '70s without a single reference to Kerouac, Ginsberg, Bradbury, Heller, Vonnegut, Didion, Barthelme, Kesey, or Tom Wolfe, and with only one, mildly disparaging, reference to J.D. Salinger (and one, patently dismissive, to Ayn Rand), has similar confessions to offer. "Young would-be writers growing up in a Jewish slum in New York or Chicago during the 'twenties and 'thirties," he writes of his own boyhood in *Celebrations and Attacks,"* found the classical Americans, especially Emerson and Thoreau, a little wan and frail, deficient in those historical entanglements we felt to be essential to literature because inescapable in life."

For example, says Howe, there is the issue of the Family. Where is the family, he asks, "in Emerson, or Thoreau, or Whitman? Even in Melville the family is a shadowy presence from which his heroes have fled before their stories begin. And where is the family in Hemingway or Fitzgerald? With Faulkner, despite all his rhetoric about honor, we might feel at home because the clamp of family which chafed his characters was like the clamp that chafed us. When we read Tolstoy we were witness to the supremacy of family life; when we read Turgenev we saw in Bazarov's parents a not-too distant version of our own. But in American literature there were all these strange and homeless solitaries, motherless and fatherless creatures like Natty and Huck and Ishmael. Didn't they know where life came from and returned to?"

Moreover, "what could we make of all the talk, both from and about Emerson, which elevated individualism to a credo of life? For most of us, individualism seemed a luxury or deception of the gentile world. Immigrant Jewish culture had been rich in eccentrics, cranks, and individualist display; even the synagogue accepted prayer at personal tempos, coming to a conclusion with about the same nicety of concord one finds in certain American orchestras. But the idea of an individual covenant with God, each man responsible for his own salvation; the claim that each man is captain of his soul (picture those immigrant kids, in white shirts and middy blouses, bawling out, 'O Captain, My Captain'); the notion that you not only have one but more than one chance in life, which constitutes the American version of grace; and the belief that you rise or fall in accord with your own merits rather than the will of alien despots—these residues of Emersonianism seemed not only strange but sometimes even a version of that brutality which our parents had warned was intrinsic to gentile life. Perhaps our exposure to this warmed-over Emersonianism prompted us to become socialists, as if thereby to make clear our distaste for these American delusions and to affirm, instead, a heritage of communal affections and responsibilities."

This distaste also drove the young Jewish literary men and women of Howe's generation to embrace another national literature as their own. "The dominant outlook of the immigrant Jewish culture" Howe writes, "was probably a shy, idealistic, ethicized, 'Russian' romanticism directed more toward social justice than personal fulfillment." The literary heroes of the young Irving Howe and his friends were not Poe, Thoreau and Twain, but rather "Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov."

With men like this sitting in judgment on American writing from the time of its first appearance, is it any wonder that our native literary traditions should have encountered such incomprehension and neglect? To the contrary, the wonder of the matter is that some of the works in these native traditions have actually, in the face of this critical obtusity, been able to establish themselves as popular—and, in a few cases, literary—classics. The great irony of the matter is that so many of those American writers who have (often posthumously) won official recognition in their own country have done so by first winning it abroad. Poe, as we have seen, first became a celebrity in France, through the translations of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. He then, as Mencken says, "began to win a slow and reluctant recognition in England (at first only from rebels and iconoclasts), and finally [once it had been established that the Europeans, the arbiters of all taste, had given them official approval, designated them as O.K.,] even in America." In our own century, the French were the first to recognize the genius of Miller and Faulkner, as well as the importance of McCoy, Cain and Dashiell Hammett. Hammett was a great favorite of André Gide. Camus was inspired to write *The Stranger* by his reading of Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice.* And Sartre was astonished to learn during an interview with an American reporter in France in 1947 that his interviewer had never heard of McCoy. The *New York Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review* reported in that same year that McCoy was "the most discussed American writer in France."

Another of the great ironies of American literary history is that the word "popular" should have been so widely used to denigrate and dismiss the work of American writers. For, thanks largely to the efforts of our critics and professors, it was a long time before American readers felt any interest in the work of American writers—before, that is, the work of American writers could by any stretch of the imagination be called "popular." As Montague Slater writes of nineteenth century America, "American book-publishing ... frowned on American authors—they were unpopular. ... American authors kept alive by taking official or academic jobs."

But as European critics and readers began "discovering" the genuinely American authors the United States was producing, American readers began coming 'round—even though, as we have seen, American critics and pedagogues never did. Eventually, these newly re-Americanized readers became so numerous and so indifferent to the views of the European-minded critics and professors they found all around them that it became common to hear talk of the decline of literature and how our best writers were unable to find an audience and how our brightest young people were no longer interested in the national letters. In fact, of course, our young people are reading more books than ever before, and our best writers are reaching more readers than ever before, more readers than Poe or Thoreau would ever have dreamed possible. It's just that these readers have finally learned to disregard the witless prattle of our critics and professors and to leave the writers these worthies nominate as our best to the oblivion they deserve.

Samuel R. Delany

Let us consider, briefly, one case in point. Samuel R. Delany is a 38-year old black American novelist, short story writer and essayist whose first genuinely major work, the novel *Dhalgren* (1975), was preceded by fourteen years of mostly undistinguished science fiction and pornography. It might in fact be said of Delany, as it was once said of George Moore, that he has conducted his literary education in public. He published his first novel, *The Jewels of Aptor,* in 1962 when he was nineteen years old, and he continued to publish at the rate of about a novel a year for the next seven years thereafter—*The Fall of the Towers* (1965), *The Ballad of Beta-II* (1965), *Empire Star* (1966), *Babel-17* (1966), *The Einstein Intersection* (1967), and *Nova* (1968)—steadily and impressively growing in sophistication and ambition and dexterity from book to book to book, but never until the very end of this first period, 1967 and '68, writing anything really distinguished, anything that mightn't as easily have been written by any one of a number of other clever young men.

Then, from 1968 to 1975, the flow of books slowed almost to a stop. There was only a pornographic novel, *The Tides of Lust* (1972), a collection of short stories, *Driftglass* (1971), and a handful of critical essays later collected in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (1977). But a very great deal of important consolidation and growth was obviously going on behind the scenes. Certain of the short stories, notably "Aye, and Gomorrah" and "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones," were brilliant achievements, better than anything Delany had done up to that time (except possibly for the author's journal entries used to introduce the larger sections of *The Einstein Intersection*). These stories proved that Delany was more than just a clever young man; they proved that he was an important literary talent.

And the essays which occupied his time during these same years—essays on science fiction, writing, reading, language and, inevitably, himself—could only add further conviction (if any were needed) to the proof. In the earliest of them, "About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words" (1968), he argued for the Poe-esque doctrine that "put in opposition to 'style', there is no such thing as 'content'." In "Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction" (1970), he touched on the important and usually overlooked connections between science fiction and symbolism. And in "Shadows" (1973-4), he produced a long (almost book-length) confessional essay in what can only be described as a clever (and entirely successful) blend of the manners of, on the one hand, Thoreau and his fellow plainspoken autobiographers, from Twain to Miller to Didion, and, on the other hand, Poe and his fellow aesthete-impressionists, from Huneker to George Jean Nathan to Susan Sontag.

Then, in January of 1975, came *Dhalgren,* a nearly 900-page Joycean tour de force of a novel which still seems to me, after five years and two thorough readings of its entire text, to stake a better claim than anything else published in this country in the last quarter-century (excepting only Gass's *Omensetter's Luck* and Nabokov's *Pale Fire*) to a permanent place as one of the enduring monuments of our national literature. *Dhalgren* is a novel which is at once rooted firmly in the American tradition of symbolism and caught up inextricably in the events and passions of its own time. And this is very nearly unprecedented (outside, perhaps of the now forgotten novels of Carl Van Vechten) in the entire history of our national letters. Even the hard-boiled symbolists, who habitually make their fables out of images drawn from the life they observe, have stopped short of actual social criticism. The dance marathon in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?,* the seamy Southern California landscape of *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* the prep school vision of New York in *The Catcher in the Rye*—all these are merely settings; their importance (as in all symbolist fiction) is entirely as symbols of "the worlds reflected in the individual mirriors" of the authors and their character stand-ins. At no time in these novels does McCoy or Cain or Salinger seek to make his setting symbolic of the whole of American society or culture; at no time does any of these authors seek to make his book a description or protrayal of anything other than his personal vision of the human situation.

Dhalgren incorporates such a personal vision, of course, but it also incorporates what will surely come to be seen as the definitive symbolic portrayal in fiction of the alternative culture of the '60s and the relations in which that alternative culture stood to the rest of American life during that wild and woolly decade. And these are only two of the many different but interrelated levels of meaning—sociological, political, aesthetic, psychological, philosophical—which are woven into the warp and woof of this great book. This tale of Bellona, a Midwestern American city of more than two million which has been transformed by some catastrophe into a blazing ruin inhabited by about a thousand scavengers and adventurers, is, as Edmund Wilson once wrote of Joyce's *Ulysses,* "animated by a complex inexhaustible life: we revisit it as we do a city, where we come more and more to recognize faces, to understand personalities, to grasp relations, currents and interest. [The

Ursula K. LeGuin

author] has exercised considerable technical ingenuity in introducing us to the elements of his story in an order which will enable us to find our bearings: yet I doubt whether any human memory is capable, on a first reading, of meeting the demands ... and when we reread it, we start in at any point, as if it were indeed something solid like a city which actually existed in space and which could be entered from any direction."

Since *Dhalgren,* Delany has published two more novels, *Triton (1976) and Tales of Neveryon (1979),* and two volumes of nonfiction, *The American Shore* (1978), a critical study of the contemporary American writer Thomas M. Disch (written largely during Delany's term as visiting Butler Chair Professor of English at SUNY, Buffalo, and his subsequent term as a fellow at the University of Wisconsin's Center for Twentieth Century Studies), and *Heavenly Breakfast* (1979), a personal memoir of '60s commune life which shades off into general speculation on the issue of social order. Each of these books is distinguished in a way that little of Delany's work was before *Dhalgren.* Each is the product of a mature and original creative vision. One at least—*Tales of Neveryon*—is, like *Dhalgren,* a major new work of American fiction. (Also like *Dhalgren*—which has sold nearly 100,000 copies a year for the past five years—it is finding readers.)

And what sort of critical response has this impressive body of work provoked? Exactly none. You may look as you will through the periodical indices in your favorite library: you will find no essays on Delany in our major magazines; you will find no author interviews with him; you will find not even so much as a single review of a single one of his fourteen books. Instead what you will find is the whining and fretting of such critics as those with whom we began our discussion. You will find John Gardner explaining that the English (notably John Fowles) have a monopoly on good fiction today, and that all American fiction is either immoral or fraudulent. You will find Henry Fairlie, an Englishman, lamenting the total absence of greatness from contemporary American writing. You will find Robert Alter bemoaning the passage of greatness in the novel and offering the names of ten Europeans (Woolf, Proust, Mann, Flaubert, Conrad, Stendhal, Emily Bronte, Kafka, D.H. Lawrence, and Dostoievsky) and only one American (Faulkner) as examples of what he means by "greatness." You will find Lewis Lapham wondering "why no American author in the past thirty years ha[s] written a major novel or play." You might even come upon a news item on the most recent presentation of the annual National Book Critics Circle Awards and learn that as far as the NBCC board of directors is concerned, the most outstanding book-length work of American fiction of 1979 was not Vonnegut's *Jailbird* or Ursula LeGuin's *Malafrena* or Donald Barthelme's *Great Days* or Eve Babitz's *Sex and Rage* or Delany's *Tales of Neveryon,* but rather *The Year of the French,* a painstakingly scholarly novel about an incident in 18th century Irish history. Just as Mencken observed sixty years ago, "the United States remains almost as much an English colonial possession, intellectually and spiritually, as it was on July 3, 1776."

Have these members of our literary aristocracy—Gardner and Fairlie and Alter and Lapham and the directors of the National Book Critics Circle—not read Delany and LeGuin and Gene Wolfe and the other distinctively American writers who are now doing important work in fiction? Or have the foolish prejudices in which they were so energetically tutored by the literary pedagogues of a generation ago rendered them permanently incapable of passing reasoned judgment on a book because it is published as a paperback original by a mass market house like Bantam or Ballantine or Fawcett or Ace, or because it is called "science fiction" by booksellers?

Like Mencken six decades ago, I must end my inquiry inconclusively—and with a word or two (which may be quoted verbatim, so similar has my own task been to his earlier one) of special pleading and self-justification. "I have described the disease. Let me say at once that I have no remedy to offer. I simply set down a few ideas, throw out a few hints, attempt a few modest inquiries into causes. Perhaps my argument often turns upon itself: the field is weed-grown and paths are hard to follow. It may be that insurmountable natural obstacles stand in the way of the development of a distinctively American culture, grounded upon a truly egoistic nationalism and supported by a native aristocracy."

One thing at least is certain: the literary aristocracy with which we are presently saddled is *not* supporting American literature, but rather European colonial literature, and only "an under-current of revolt, small but vigorous," signals the possibility of any happier state of affairs in the future. The Anglophiles and Europhiles of American letters remain firmly in control. "Today, as in the day of Emerson, they set the tune. ... But into the singing there occasionally enters a discordant note. On some dim tomorrow, perhaps, perchance, peradventure, they may be challenged." ❑

Jeff Riggenbach is Executive Editor of *LR*.

BOOKS ARTS

Norman Podhoretz

Marching in step

ROY A. CHILDS, JR.

Breaking Ranks, *by Norman Podhoretz. Harper and Row, 375 pp., $15.*

NORMAN PODHORETZ, the editor of *Commentary* magazine, is one of the most influential intellectuals in America, and has for the last two decades been in the midst of most of today's major cultural and political battles. When such a man flirts with radicalism, and then moves (together with such figures as Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol) to lead a host of prominent intellectuals down the path to what is now called "neoconservatism," we have the right to expect something important in his "political memoir," as *Breaking Ranks* is subtitled. We expect a penetrating look at the political landscape over the past several decades, and some sort of sustained argument, an accounting of how Podhoretz came to flirt with radicalism, and how he came to his present views.

And that indeed is precisely what we are promised. The memoir proper is sandwiched between a Prologue and a Postscript, both of which are letters to his son, John. Podhoretz tells his son that yes, he really did believe "all that stuff," as he calls his radical views, and promises him a full accounting of how he came to his views.

I therefore leaped at the book, fully prepared to seize Podhoretz's argument and eviscerate it, or at the very least, to subject it to the kind of scrutiny I did Irving Kristol's *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (*LR*, November 1978). No such luck. The plain fact is that there is scarcely a sustained political argument in the book, and even fewer complex ideas.

Instead, what we get is a gossipy book in the tradition of Podhoretz's earlier memoir, *Making It,* rehashing yet again the battles between the Jewish intellectuals of the 1930s, '40s and '50s, and parading before us once again all those now aging figures who, apparently, are still at the center of Podhoretz's world—Lillian Hellman, Lionel Trilling (now dead), Sidney Hook, Norman Mailer, Jason Epstein. The disputes between the Stalinists and the Trotskyists, between the liberals of the 1950s who were anticommunist and those who weren't, between, in fact, one host of rude, nasty backstabbing, pretentious narcissists and another, are recounted in full, complete with juicy anecdotes, as though all of it *mattered.* As self-centered gossip laced with ethnocentrism, the book makes it; as a political memoir, it falls on its face.

If one were to take this memoir at face value, it would put Podhoretz in rather a bad light. For if anything emerges from its pages, it is that Norman Podhoretz lives in a tiny little world of other (mainly Jewish) intellectuals, and that the political world of events and actions is not *real* to him. He reacts not to political events, but to the intemperate behavior of Jason Epstein, not to the Vietnam War, but to the snarling of trendy New Left "intellectuals." When he flirted with radicalism, it was a "narcissistic" cultural radicalism, not really a polit-

ical one, and he adopted it out of boredom with mainstream American life rather than as the result of intellectual effort. When he "broke ranks" with this radicalism, it was mainly a response to the behavior and vehemence of language of those others who had adopted the mantle of radicalism, rather than an independent reaction to an objective set of political circumstances.

The story goes like this: Podhoretz was born in New York City, raised in a Jewish family and tradition, and his early politics were, as were those of most Jewish intellectuals at first, largely socialist. "When I arrived at Columbia College in 1946," he writes, "I was not quite seventeen years old, and to the extent that I cared about politics at all ... my views were the standard views of those American liberals who were suspicious of America and sympathetic to the Soviet Union. That was only natural: where I came from and went to school that kind of liberalism was the dominant orthodoxy." But by the time he graduated, he had "been converted into a passionate partisan of the new liberalism — the kind that was at once pro-American and anti-Communist."

He fell in with a lot of like-minded intellectuals, most of whom were at least a bit older, and many of whom, like Irving Kristol, had been Trotskyists and hence bitter enemies of Stalin. He studied literature throughout the fifties, wrote some literary pieces, worked on a few magazines and with a few publishers, and by 1960, at the age of thirty, took over the editorship of *Commentary,* the prestigious magazine published by the American Jewish Committee. By that time he had grown bored with American life and began flirting with the cultural radicalism of such figures as Norman O. Brown and Paul Goodman (whose *Growing Up Absurd* was partially serialized in the first three issues of *Commentary* under Podhoretz's editorship). His newfound radicalism led him to poke around the fringes of the peace and disarmament movements, and when the war in Indochina began to heat up in the early 1960s, Podhoretz found himself in opposition to it — but not, you understand, in any particularly passionate or agitated way, rather in an almost disinterested fashion, as, well, you know, the "wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time — wrong not morally but in the sense of being an impossible war to win." *That* kind of "radicalism."

As the radical movement of the 1960s got underway, Podhoretz began to shake his head in dismay. Things simply got out of hand. There was the civil rights movement, with its violence just beneath the surface sometimes breaking out into the open. There were all those odd people experimenting with different lifestyles, even homosexuality, finding themselves hostile to many American institutions and traditions. There were the students protesting the gigantic, usually State-run multiversities, which they perceived to be molding them for purposes of which they disapproved. And most of all, perhaps, there were those for whom the military draft and the war in Vietnam were not merely inconvenient, but flatly and simply *evil.* This, to Podhoretz, was "anti-Americanism," and he would have none of it. He became more and more suspicious of the motives of his fellow intellectuals who had fallen in with this new radicalism, and began to break ranks, converting both himself and *Commentary* into bitter enemies of the "New Left" and the counterculture, assailing their values across the board. By the end of the 1960s, he had published a memoir, *Making It,* calculated to enrage the literary establishment, by *celebrating* what he calls the "dirty little secret" of the intellectuals: that they, too, long for success.

For thus "breaking ranks" and celebrating this "dirty little secret," Podhoretz relates his treatment at the hand of the New Left mob: he faced what he calls the "terror." And what did the "terror" amount to? To the fact that his book received bad, even nasty, reviews, and he didn't get invited out to lunch any more. In one particularly heartrending scene in the book, he recounts the "big parties" he used to throw (for "I knew and was on good terms with 'everyone' in New York and I gave and went to large parties all the time").

They were big parties, sometimes running to 150 guests or more and including many people of an older generation who had not seen or spoken to one another since the political wars of the thirties and forties, and many who would soon break off relations because of the political wars of the late sixties and seventies. (Once at the height of those later wars, my wife and I and our daughter Ruth visited the Moynihans, who were then living in Cambridge, and who invited some people over to see us. Ruth, then about nine years old, looked around the room and said wistfully to Maura Moynihan, also about nine, "We used to have parties like this in our house too, but that was before pol'tics.")

It's enough to leave the reader in tears.

But *Breaking Ranks* is not merely a book filled with gossip about people who stopped speaking to each other because of heated political conflicts (this sort of thing, of course, is hardly limited to the New York intellectuals of whom Podhoretz writes). It also touches on some of the most important of Podhoretz's views in the area of foreign policy. And while *Commentary* has taken the lead in a great many cultural and political battles over the past decade and more — it has opposed the "new equality," opposed busing and quotas, promoted nuclear power, defended economic growth, opposed "the population controllers," and debunked some of the myths of solar power — more and more over the years, it has assumed the mantle of leading hawk journal of the day, assailing isolationism and noninterventionism, and defending an actively interventionist foreign policy frankly modelled after the global "idealism" of Woodrow Wilson.

As the Vietnam War drew to a close, *Commentary* became the leading journal of opinion to oppose the move toward isolationism on the part of the American public. And its assault on that tendency was relentless. A few of the pieces *Commentary* published over the past few years have included: "Is Isolationism Possible?" by Raymond Aron (4/74), "Was Woodrow Wilson Right?" by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (5/74), "Detente," by Theodore Draper (6/74), "Oil: The Issue of American Intervention," and "Further Reflections on Oil and Force," both by former isolationist Robert W. Tucker (1/75, 3/75), "The United States in Opposition," by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (3/75) — a piece which saw Moynihan catapulted to the UN Ambassadorship, a symposium on "America Now: A Failure of Nerve?" (7/75), "The West in Retreat," by Walter Laquer (8/75), "Appeasement and Detente," by Theodore Draper (2/76), "The Greening of American Foreign Policy," by Peter Berger (3/76), "Making the World Safe for Communism," and "The Abandonment of Israel," by Norman Podhoretz (4/76 and 7/76), "Eurocommu-

nism and Its Friends," by Walter Laquer (8/76), "Anglocommunism," by Robert Moss (2/77), "Why the Soviet Union Thinks it Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War," by Richard Pipes (7/77), "Africa, Soviet Imperialism and the Retreat of American Power," by Bayard Rustin and Carl Gershman (10/77), "Vietnam: New Light on the Question of American Guilt," by Guenter Lewy (2/78), and an interminable series of articles on Israel and the Middle East.

The overall thrust of these articles is that American foreign policy is in retreat, and that this retrenchment of American power threatens Israel. And that, unfortunately, is the key which unlocks the whole of the foreign policy of the neoconservatives. For in a rather large book which complains constantly about the diminution of "standards" on the Left, this book actually articulates only two standards to be used in judging events—beyond vague endorsements of democracy, an undefined "freedom," and the like—and those two are, oddly enough, at odds with one another.

The first, which is used in opposing quotas, is frankly individualistic: that every individual should be judged on his own merits, not as the member of any group. The second, used in evaluating all sorts of social programs, and especially in evaluating American foreign policy, is not individualistic at all, but frankly tribal, to wit: "Is it good for the Jews?" (p. 334) Podhoretz frankly urges the Jewish community to act on the basis of this question. It seems never to have occurred to Podhoretz that in an era of increasing tribalism and ethnic rivalries, to pose so blatant an ethnic standard of evaluating political events could in fact *harm* the Jews, and serve to undermine their actual interests as individuals. Yet it is this very ethnocentrism which has led Podhoretz and *Commentary* to find in every move toward a noninterventionist foreign policy a threat to Israel. Podhoretz had earlier taken it upon himself to exhort the intellectual community that "intellectuals as intellectuals had a far greater stake in the maintenance of a liberal democratic order than they had ever realized...." meaning by this the modern liberal establishment, the Welfare-Warfare state, under which the intellectual community should fight for "the financial support it needed to exist," yet "would also have to fight against the government's use of this support to interfere with cultural and academic freedom." But Podhoretz realized that this "need" for support from government, combined with a fierce resistance to government control, was not merely true of the intellectual community,

> It applied with perhaps even greater force to the other community of which I was a member, the Jewish community. As I now felt obligated to declare my interest as an intellectual, I also felt obligated to declare my interest as a Jew; and as I tried to persuade my fellow intellectuals that radicalism was their enemy and not their friend, I tried to make the same point in addressing my fellow Jews.

Referring to the "hostility to Jews and Jewish interests within the Movement," Podhoretz writes that,

> By 1970 almost everyone knew that the radical Left was antagonistic to Israel; and even though opposition to the state of Israel was in theory not necessarily a form of anti-Semitism, the "anti-Zionism" of the radical Left was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from anti-Semitism in the more familiar sense.

"Just as most liberals want to solve problems caused by the welfare state by throwing more money at them, Podhoretz wants to solve the problems caused by our foreign policy by throwing more weapons at them."

This tarring with the brush of anti-Semitism of anyone who did not back nearly unlimited and unconditional support of Israel had indeed become commonplace in Podhoretz's community: opponents of an interventionist foreign policy were seen as opponents of Israel, and opponents of Zionism were seen as anti-Semitic, regardless of the fact that there are no necessary connections among any of these. But it was the perceived connections among them which led Podhoretz and his community to "face up to the fact that continued American support for Israel depended upon continued American involvement in international affairs—from which it followed that an American withdrawal into the kind of isolationist mood that had prevailed most recently between the two world wars, and that now looked as though it might soon prevail again, represented a direct threat to the security of Israel." And so the isolationist mood which followed in the wake of the Vietnam debacle was seen as something to be fought, and its perpetrators were, more often than not, branded anti-Semites.

Needless to add, this was sometimes true. But if it was sometimes true, it was not at other times. The tendency of those closely associated with Jewish traditions to identify *any* criticism of American intervention in the Middle East, *any* criticism of Israel, or of unconditional American support for Israel, as being "anti-Semitic," is similar to the way in which Stokely Carmichael had tried years ago to intimidate Podhoretz with the epithet "racist," and the partisans of American intervention in World War II had labelled all opponents of American intervention "fascists."

In Podhoretz's case, the clear intent of the attempted intimidation, which in his writings took the form of his two classic articles "Making the World Safe for Communism," and "The Abandonment of Israel," (*Commentary*, 4/76 and 7/76), has been to silence effectively any attempt to question or to oppose America's foreign policy of global interventionism. That is why any attempt to disengage from our worldwide military and other foreign policy commitments is portrayed in the pages of *Commentary* as the result of a "failure of will," of American "weakness," and the like. All of this has been intended simply to halt the debate over our foreign policy goals and strategies, and to portray noninterventionism as a weak, pro-communist, anti-Semitic and generally vile foreign policy.

But let us use Podhoretz's own ethnic standard in judging the wisdom of this—is it good for the Jews? Nothing can be more obvious as the 1980s dawn but that, after all, an American foreign policy interventionist and strong enough to *buy* Israel's security, is a foreign policy strong enough to *sell* Israel's security. And that is precisely what is happening. Podhoretz is anything but

naive on this score, and clearly understands the state of affairs which has led our Middle East foreign policy to center around guaranteeing our access to oil from the region. His answer to the growing instability of the region is the opposite of strategic disengagement; he favors a stepped up military presence. He does not consider whether or not this will merely make matters *more* unstable. As a supporter of the Welfare State, in the tradition of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson, Podhoretz still does not realize that the welfare state is in practice achieving the opposite of its intended results; as a supporter of the warfare state, he does not realize that the same is true in foreign affairs. Thus, just as most liberals want to solve problems caused by the welfare state by throwing more money at them, Podhoretz wants to solve the problems caused by our interventionist foreign policy by throwing more weapons at them.

But the plain, unvarnished truth is that the Israelis have gotten themselves into a no-win situation, unless they can make their own accommodations with their Arab neighbors, most of whom are not too friendly, to put it mildly. When the Zionists set up a Jewish state in what had been Palestine in the late 1940s, they were in effect setting up a Jewish refuge which was surrounded by tens of millions of hostile Arabs. They have exacerbated the problem since, by seizing more and more land belonging to Palestinians, and generally treating the Palestinians in a shabby manner. Golda Meir actually went so far as to deny that there *were* any Palestinians: "There was no such thing as Palestinians ... It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people, and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist." This rather breathtaking claim, of course, is far from the truth — and to point that out, let us note, does *not* constitute an endorsement of the murderous PLO, or the dishonest claim that Palestinians are, in general, treated any better by other Arab nations than they are by Israel.

"An American policy of open borders, free immigration, and strategic disengagement from the Middle East would do far more for this explosive situation than a tarring of anti-interventionists with the brush of anti-Semitism."

Over-burdened by the bone-crushing level of taxation and inflation—a record one hundred and eleven percent for 1979 — which finances their military, surrounded by hostile neighbors, having produced hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, and finding themselves in an unstable demographic situation—the birth rate of Palestinians in Israel far exceeds that of the Israelis, and the number of Jews leaving Israel now exceeds emigration to Israel, so that within a few years the Israelis will be greatly outnumbered — the Israelis are in fact in a dangerously unstable situation. No amount of American military presence in the Middle East is going to do anything but harm in the long run. It can only lead us into a war which will most assuredly *not* be good for the Jews. An American policy of open borders, free immigration, and strategic disengagement from the region would do far more to help this explosive situation than an unthinking tarring of the opponents of American intervention with the brush of "Munich" or "anti-Semitism."

But Podhoretz over the years has not been content merely to label any move toward noninterventionism "pro-communist" or "anti-Semitic." He has also managed to find a disparaging cultural root for this disengagement from irrational foreign policy commitments. As far as he went in "The Abandonment of Israel," in making the claim that the survival of Israel should be "the primary aim of [our] policies and the primary wish of [our] hearts," a little more than a year later he was to go even further, following in the best tradition of the "Jew-baiting" of the 1920s. In an article in the October 1977 issue of *Harper's* entitled "The Culture of Appeasement," Podhoretz blamed World War II—and, by extension, any possible future war — on homosexuals. In the interwar period, in the wake of the slaughter of World War I, British homosexuals, it seemed, wormed their way into the fabric of British society, into education and the arts, and there spread pacifism so as to avoid in the future the killing of beautiful young lads. (Apparently the pointless slaughter hadn't bothered their heterosexual parents.) This atittude of "appeasement," nurtured by gay people, made it impossible to stand up to Hitler, and World War II was the result.

All in all, "The Culture of Appeasement" was the performance of a desperate man. Not only are the historical assumptions it made about the origins of World War II shockingly naive and simple-minded, resting almost totally on the myths of court historians, but there is something outrageously immoral about a Jew — a member of one of the most scapegoated minorities in history — stooping to the shabby scapegoating of another, the homosexuals, thinking all the while that this is "good for the Jews." And the scapegoating did not stop there: In *Breaking Ranks,* Podhoretz touts his own courage in questioning the "moral and medical" aspects of homosexuality, claiming that those who do not produce children — lesbians and gay men, one presumes — are filled with "self-loathing," and are rebelling against their very identities:

> The same spiritual illiteracy that made it so easy for so many to mistake the self-hatred into which their own children or they themselves had fallen in the sixties for political idealism now makes it easy to misread the female self-hatred so evident in elements of the women's movement or the male self-hatred pervading the gay-rights campaign. ... Yet there can be no more radical refusal of self-acceptance than the repudiation of one's own biological nature; and there can be no abdication of responsibility more fundamental than the refusal of a man to become, and to be, a father, or the refusal of a woman to become, and be, a mother.

That such a claim can be made seriously is indeed a symbol of how low intellectual standards have fallen. Would Podhoretz make this claim about Pope John-Paul II, or the entire Catholic clergy, or of all those others whose personal choices and career goals do not allow for the responsibility of parenthood? This sort of "courage," which Podhoretz showed again in January 1979, by publishing

in *Commentary* one of the most loathsome pieces on gay people yet to have seen print — Samuel McCracken's "Are Homosexuals Gay," which presented the seediest aspect of gay life as the norm (tacitly contrasting the worst in the gay world with the best among heterosexual family life) — is indeed, in the age of Anita Bryant and John Briggs, the age of scapegoating, beatings and murders of open homosexuals, fully comparable to the "courage" of that tiny band who "broke ranks" in the 1920s to question the "moral and medical" aspects of Jewish life. It is a disgusting spectacle, and is one of the clearest examples in our time of the point made by Thomas Szasz that those victimized as scapegoats, once they have power, often turn to victimizing others.

(There is a certain double standard and shabby use of euphemism here which should be pointed out as well. Why is it "anti-American" for some Americans, acting in the glorious traditions of this country, to oppose the actions of the American state, as the New Left did during the Vietnam War? Why is it "self-hatred" when some Americans despise others, such men as Johnson, Nixon and Kissinger, who violate important human standards in their conduct? Why is it "self-loathing" for some individual men and women to have different views of their own identity than those of Podhoretz, and to accept different lifestyles as paths to self-fulfillment and individual happiness? Why is it a "rebellion against one's nature" to choose to do with one's life perfectly respectable things that do not involve raising children? And why, when women, blacks and gays and others who have suffered oppression, rise up to demand to be treated with dignity and to have their individual rights respected, is this a "culture of appeasement," fathering a "failure of will," rather than the social *self-assertion* of individuals which it so obviously is? And why is it not therefore a *positive,* rather than a *negative,* social phenomenon? Is our cultural critic blind to these obvious alternative explanations?)

The problem with *Breaking Ranks* is that Norman Podhoretz *didn't.* He began as a supporter of establishment, anti-Communist liberalism in the tradition of Roosevelt and Truman, an advocate of government regulation and redistribution of wealth, of social welfare programs and a global presence for America in the international arena, an ardent Zionist and cultural conservative. He ends in the same place, his flirtation with radicalism having been only shallow and derivative. In short, he began and he ends as an ordinary establishment liberal.

In a recent symposium in the January 1980 issue of *Commentary,* a group of Jewish liberals — past and present — gathered to consider the relationship between "Liberalism and the Jews." A great many of these Jewish intellectuals find themselves uncomfortable with liberalism, but the common complaint is — where else is there to go? The world of Jewish intellectuals in which Norman Podhoretz was raised was a socialist world, in which to be Jewish was, virtually, to be socialist. But Podhoretz has for too long lived in the confines of that narrow world. There is another tradition which has in common with the liberalism of the past the conviction that everyone should be evaluated on his or her own merits as an individual, that the individual is responsible for his or her own life, and should be free to live it as he or she chooses — with no restrictions save one, that no one initiate coercion against others. This sort of ideal of individual liberty was the ideal of classical liberalism — the classical liberalism which helped the Jews of the 19th century to be emancipated from their ghettos. This tradition is alive today, in the modern libertarian movement, and it has in common with socialism that it, too, was founded by Jewish intellectuals. If one were only to name a handful of the intellectuals who struggled to found liberterianism, one would surely include Ludwig von Mises, Frank Chodorov, Ayn Rand, Murray Rothbard, Milton Friedman, Nathaniel Branden, Thomas Szasz, and Robert Nozick. There have been others, too, including such non-Jews as Leonard Read, Robert LeFevre, Rose Wilder Lane, and F.A. Hayek. But if anything is clear, in reading Norman Podhoretz's *Breaking Ranks,* it is the extent to which most establishment Jewish liberals really never *have* broken ranks, the extent to which they have, for decades, been bogged down in assumptions and premises never questioned or revised.

If liberalism is indeed at a dead end, we can only point Jewish intellectuals, and indeed, everyone else interested in a new political direction, toward the libertarian movement. Founded largely by heroic Jewish intellectuals and by other individualists who, facing the most obnoxious pressure, the most scandalous treatment at the hands of the intellectual establishment, facing smears and vindictive asasults and virtual intellectual ostracism, had the courage and the independence and the vision to found a new movement, libertarianism offers by far the greatest incentive — and reward — to those interested in truly "breaking ranks."

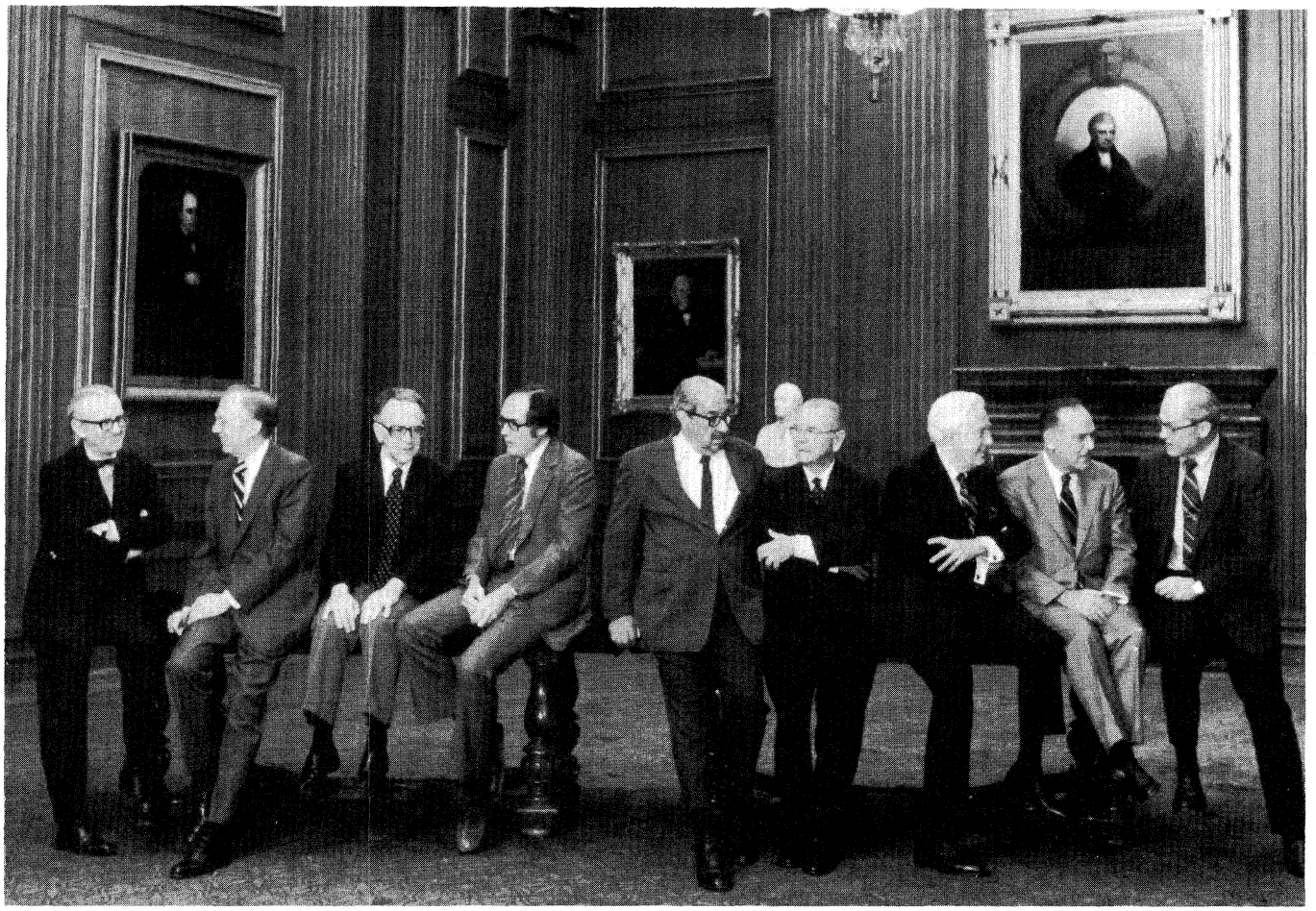
Roy A. Childs, Jr. is The Editor of *LR.*

Clerks' confessions

JOAN KENNEDY TAYLOR

The Brethren, *by Bob Woodward & Scott Armstrong, Simon and Schuster, 467 pp., $13.95.*

THIS BOOK, WHICH HAS variously been described as "irresponsible journalism at its best" (Robert Sherrill, *New West*), "a worm's eye view of the Supreme Court" (George F. Will), and "the most comprehensive inside story ever written of the most important court in the world" (Jethro K. Lieberman, *Business Week*), may well be the *Star Wars* of the book business this year. It was obviously planned to be a best-seller, and it is. On sale well in time for Christmas even though it was not officially published until January, it has been excerpted by *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post,* distributed as a Book of the Month, and reviewed by almost everyone. The authors received paid leaves from *The Washington Post* (where Woodward is Managing Editor for metropolitan news and Armstrong a reporter) and a $350,000 advance from Simon and Schuster. They spent two years interviewing more than 200 people, including Justices, present and past Court employees, and "more than 170 former law clerks," all of whom spoke off the record. They also managed to obtain eight file drawers full of documents — "memos, notes, diaries and other documents from the chambers of eleven of the twelve men who have served on the Burger Court." (The one exception is the Court's newest appointee, John Paul Stevens.) As the movie industry has discovered, you have to spend money to make money, and it looks as



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(left to right) Supreme Court Justices John Paul Stevens, Harry A. Blackmun, William H. Rehnquist, Thurgood Marshall, William J. Brennan, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, Potter Stewart, and Byron W. White.

if *The Brethren* will make back much more than its initial investment.

Like the vogue for science fiction, detective stories, and crossword puzzles, the popularity of *The Brethren* shows that the American reading public is basically intellectual. This book is a scandal story without sex, violence, or venality, a story in which the titilating revelations are of attempts to support a vision of the good in a legally unsubstantiated way, of Justices conspiring together, not to gain power, but to correct a colleague's phraseology or citation of precedent, of legal slipshoddiness and wheeler-dealing in matters of principle, and of reluctance to retire despite strokes and even blindness.

The Justices seem to agree on little besides the importance of the Court's continuing credibility and of the continuity of its decisions. This consideration makes them careful in picking what cases they will hear. They may refuse to hear a particular case because they know they cannot agree on the reasons for an opinion, or they may refuse to hear a case because they know the decision will be narrow, with elder Justices in the majority, leading to the possibility that a new majority might overrule the decision in the next term of the Court should one of them retire or die.

Woodward and Armstrong list seven steps that each case the Court hears goes through, and the first decision-making step is the decision to hear the case at all, called *granting certiorari* (or *cert* for short). At least four Justices must vote to do this, at a conference from which all spectators, including their clerks, are excluded. The second step is for the lawyers on both sides of the case to present written briefs and oral arguments. Then the case is discussed at another closed conference and a preliminary vote is taken. Fourth, at the case conference, a Justice is assigned to write a majority opinion. The assignment is made by the senior Justice in the majority—if the Chief Justice is in the majority, he always assigns the opinion, as he is considered senior to all the others. At the same time that the majority opinion is being drafted, other Justices may be writing dissenting or concurring opinions. All of these drafts are printed in the Court's private print shop and circulated among the Justices—a process that can take months, during which time a great deal of horsetrading may occur. Sometimes a dissent is so persuasive that it picks up enough support to become the majority opinion, and sometimes elements of a dissent or a concurrence are incorporated in a majority opinion in order to win support. It is not unknown for the writer assigned a majority opinion to totally reverse his argument in order to keep the opinion in his hands. The sixth step is one in which previously uncommitted Justices formally join one of the circulating opinions, and the last step is the announcement and publication of the final versions of the opinions—the only step which is public.

The fact that dissents and concurrences are published as well as majority opinions gives future Justices access to constitutional arguments that may well prove to be persuasive at a later time. Justice Hugo Black, for instance, who served on the Court for 34 years until his resignation in 1971, saw some of his early dissenting opinions become the basis for later majority opinions;

and Justice William O. Douglas took great care in laying out all the elements of each case in his written opinions in order to reach the general public, although he rarely tried to persuade his colleagues in conference.

The Brethren takes the reader through the first seven terms of the Burger Court (a term begins in October and runs through the following spring) but discusses the deliberations surrounding only a small number of the more than 1,000 opinions issued by the Court during that period. What a period it was! The Court issued controversial opinions on abortion, the death penalty, antitrust actions, busing, women's rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, obscenity, campaign financing, prior restraint of publications (the Pentagon Papers case), and executive privilege (the Nixon Tapes case), among others.

The case involving campaign financing, *Buckley v. Valeo,* which came before the Court in the 1975 term, is the case in which the Libertarian Party joined several other representatives of minority political viewpoints, including Senator James M. Buckley and former presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy, in challenging the 1974 federal campaign law, which provided for the financing of major presidential campaigns from tax money, mandated public reporting of expenditures and of contributors' names, limited political contributions to $1000, and also listed the amounts that candidates could spend on their campaigns.

At conference, Burger accepted the challengers' arguments that the law, masquerading as a reform, really struck at the heart of First Amendment freedoms. To limit contributions and expenditures was to curtail political activity and speech. To force disclosure of contributors' names was a violation of their privacy and their right of political association. Public financing of presidential campaigns would open the door to government interference in the political process. Burger said he would vote to strike the entire law.

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Chief Justice Warren E. Burger with former Supreme Court Justice Tom Campbell Clark, who retired from the Court in 1967 when his son, Ramsey Clark, was appointed Attorney General.

The other seven Justices [William O. Douglas had just retired and had not yet been replaced] seemed to favor major portions of the law, though each had a reservation about one or more of the provisions. But the majority upheld most of the law including the section on public financing of presidential campaigns.

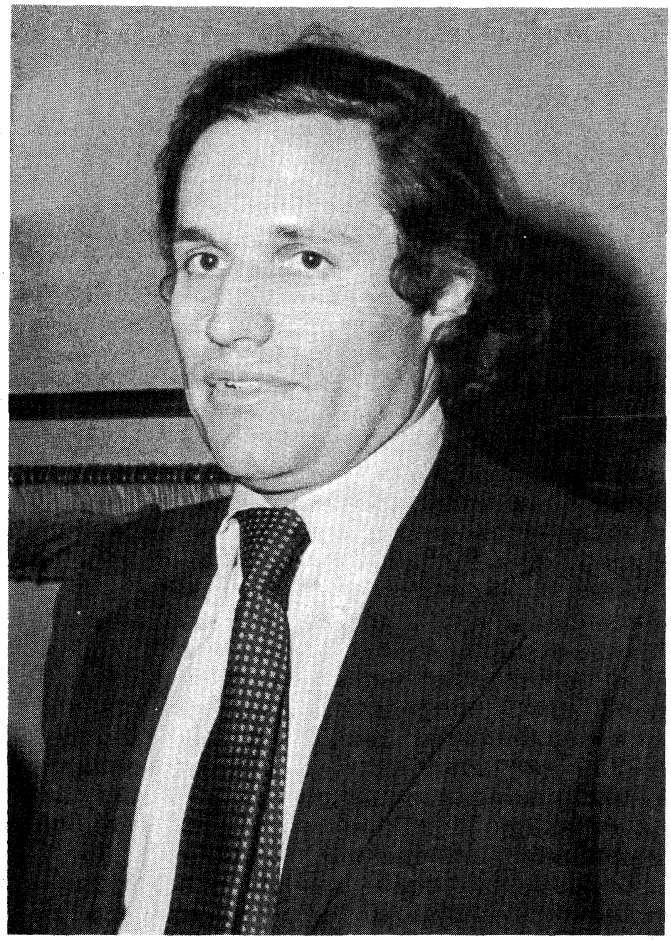
A committee of three Justices (William J. Brennan, Jr., Potter Stewart, and Lewis F. Powell, Jr.) was formed to collaborate on an unattributed opinion in order to get the case decided before the first scheduled disbursement of public money to candidates, which was about six weeks away. It upheld every provision of the law except the limits on what candidates could spend. But Douglas, who had been a member of the Court when the oral arguments had been heard on the case, decided that he too was entitled to write an opinion. He came back to his old chambers and circulated a thirteen-page memorandum which discussed both the Federal Election Campaign Act cases and his right to continue to participate in Court decisions under the law that provided for retired Justices, telling one of his former clerks that he intended to publish the memo as a dissent. It was printed and circulated to the other Justices, but never released to the public—the final decision, "with separate concurrences and dissents by everyone except Brennan, Stewart and Powell," was reported as the work of an eight-man Court.

In this memo, Douglas agreed with those who had challenged the law (and also, for a rare time in his life, with Burger) that providing public money to popular candidates helped keep the incumbent party in power. He also was concerned about the spending and contribution limits. In a passage that could have been referring to the Libertarian Party itself, he wrote,

> History shows that financial power and political power eventually merge and unite to do their work together.... The federal bureaucracy at the present time is effectively under the control of the corporate and moneyed interests of the nation. A new party formed to oust the hold that the corporate and financial interests have is presently by the terms of this act unqualified to get a dime.

It may interest libertarian readers that in their account of this challenge to the Federal Election Campaign Act, Woodward and Armstrong nowhere mention the Libertarian Party.

The book is harshest in its



GLOBE PHOTOS

Bob Woodward, now managing editor of *The Washington Post* and co-author with Scott Armstrong of *The Brethren.*

picture of Chief Justice Warren Burger. The authors employ a fictionalized form of narrative in which they attribute thoughts and reactions to all the Justices, including Burger, whom they definitely state they never interviewed. There is no way for the reader to disentangle information they gained off the record from the authors' personal evaluations — or from the evaluations of a biased employee, for that matter. Whatever the sources, Burger is presented as a stupid, incompetent, uninformed, highhanded man, with an almost paranoid fear that the confidentiality of the Court will be violated (Not so paranoid, as the existence of this book attests). *Business Week* summarized the impression the book gives by illustrating its review with a cartoon that shows all the Justices reading copies of *The Brethren,* but Warren Burger is holding his copy upside down.

Sometimes the anecdotes that illustrate this view of Burger seem to have a ring of truth to them, as when Burger is described as responding to the news from the Court carpenter that the chair being prepared for Justice John Paul Stevens won't be ready for his swearing-in ceremony by saying, "I have ruled that it will be done on time."

On the other hand, many of them are examples of the presumption of the authors in going inside their subjects' heads: Thurgood Marshall "had always seen Burger as an inappropriate caretaker of a seat that had belonged to a man of the stature of Earl Warren." Douglas "despised" Burger. In the eyes of Potter Stewart, Burger "was a product of Richard Nixon's tasteless White House, distinguished in appearance and bearing, but without substance or integrity. Burger was abrasive to his colleagues, persistent in ignorance, and, worst of all, intellectually dishonest." And "It was not just the Chief's intellectual inadequacies or his inability to write coherent opinions that bothered Powell. There was something overbearing and offensive about the Chief's style."

It is clear that the book has somewhat of a double standard in Chief Justices. The liberal Earl Warren emerges as a man of "stature" who "led a judicial revolution that reshaped many social and political relationships in America." While Burger's "intellectual inadequacies" are reported by the authors as bothering his colleagues, Earl Warren's deficiencies are reported in quite a different way: "Warren was not an abstract thinker, nor was he a gifted scholar. He was more interested in the basic fairness of decisions than the legal rationales."

And whereas Burger's "inability to write coherent opinions" is repeatedly stressed, it turns out that the revered Earl Warren had avoided such criticism by never writing the opinions that appeared under his name—he delegated that job to his law clerks. "Warren told them how he wanted the cases to come out. But the legal research and the drafting of Court opinions —even those that had made Warren and his Court famous and infamous—were their domain."

Similarly, much is made of Burger's attempts to control the assigning of opinions by making sure that he is on the side of the majority in the case conferences. This, it is indicated, is an unworthy way of influencing the direction of the Court. But under Earl Warren, "It had been Brennan who had sat each Thursday with Warren preparing an orchestration for the Friday conference.

" 'Well, guys, it's all taken care of,' Brennan often told his clerks after the sessions with Warren. With votes from Fortas, Marshall, and usually Douglas, Brennan rarely failed to put together a majority." The view is attributed to Justice John M. Harlan that, as a result of these strategy sessions, there was a sense "at times under Warren, that the debate was a sham."

One of the most interesting and little-known aspects of the functioning of the Court which is revealed by this book is the role of the Justices' clerks. It is rare for a Justice to delegate as much to his clerks as Warren reportedly did, but it appears to be routine for clerks to write the first drafts of the opinions which the Justices circulate among themselves. "We may have to dissent," Stewart tells his clerk. "Your thing may be published yet." Harlan's clerks normally wrote his first drafts, although he was known in his day as "the Court's most prolific writer." Byron W. White races his clerks to see if he or they complete a first draft. One of Burger's clerks in the 1972 term is described as "a talented translator of the Chief's visceral reactions into reasoned legal positions" (Note the difference in tone between this description and the description of Warren and *his* clerks cited earlier). Only Douglas appears to have written everything himself, and even told Eric Severeid in an interview that the Court doesn't need law clerks — he would be willing to do all the looking up of precedents himself, a statement much doubted by the tired clerks working late in his office. Once, when a clerk reorganized one of his drafted opinions, Douglas called him in and said, "I can see you've done a lot of work, but you are off base here. If and when you get appointed to the Supreme Court you can write opin-

ions as you choose."

The statement is not as sarcastic as it might appear —on the present Court, three members, Byron White, William Rehnquist, and John Paul Stevens, all once held Supreme Court clerkships.

The Court's clerks are recent law school graduates who graduated near the top of their class. They are chosen to be, for a year, "confidential assistants, ghost writers, extra sons and intimates." More recently, there have been some extra daughters, too, as Justices have been willing to pick an occasional woman for the job. Often clerks are chosen by a clerk selection committee, although some Justices, like Lewis Powell, prefer to interview "the two dozen top applicants" themselves. Once hired, the clerks operate as an informal network that transmits information from chamber to chamber. They eat together in a clerks' dining room, discuss and argue current cases, get information from each other about how willing their bosses might be to modify an opinion — even sometimes give each other helpful suggested wordings for opinions that are being drafted. All of this helps to expedite the business of the Court.

According to Woodward and Armstrong, the clerks are generally more liberal than the Justices whom they serve. During the Vietnam War, for instance, most of the clerks, but not the Justices, were sympathetic to the anti-war movement. Often Justices seek out liberal clerks. Justice Powell, for instance, chooses liberal clerks for their ability to challenge him, telling them "that the conservative side of the issues came to him naturally." And Justice Rehnquist, who once wrote a critical article about the liberalism of Supreme Court clerks and was at first concerned that he would be too influenced by them, wrote all his first drafts himself when he came to the Court. Halfway through his first full term, he realized that "the legal and moral interchanges that liberal clerks thrived on were good for the Justices and for the Court. Rehnquist grew to trust his clerks; they would not be so foolish as to try putting something over on him." Like other Justices, he let them draft his opinions: "It saved him time, and helped focus his own thinking."

Most of the reviews of *The Brethren* have registered some degree of surprise that Supreme Court Justices are human beings, complete with foibles, quirks, prejudices, enthusiasms, and limited knowledge.

It may, of course, be distressing to some that Justices in the highest court in the land swear at each other; refer to their Chief as "Dummy" to their clerks; receive and send notes relating to baseball scores and basketball shoes while supposedly listening to oral argument from the bench; and can at times be influenced by flattery, threats, or emotional appeals. But somehow, these imperfect and fallible people manage to come together and make far-reaching decisions — they succeed in functioning as one of the branches of our government.

The problem in understanding any sort of group decision has always been the problem of answering the question, how do groups operate? How do people who have differing interpretations of a set of principles which they nominally agree on (in the Court's case, these principles are the language of the Constitution) agree to apply these principles to a specific instance?

One answer, which *The Brethren* illuminates in often fascinating ways, is embodied in the concept of the adversary system of law. The assumption of this system is that the truth emerges most clearly when the best possible case is made both for and against a given proposition, and, further, when both these cases are presented to a group of people—a jury—who may differ in their evaluation of the arguments. The cases that come before ordinary juries concern questions of fact in civil and criminal cases: Did the accused do what the prosecution (or the defendant do what the plaintiff) said was done? And, if so, are there any extenuating circumstances? The cases that come before the Supreme Court—which is, in this sense, the highest "jury" in the land—concern the Constitution: Was this lower court decision justified by the Constitution, or not? The Justices are presented with arguments defending and attacking the proposition that the lower court decision was constitutional, and then they decide, often differing in their evaluation of the arguments. The fact that the Court publishes not only its conclusions but its reasoning is an additional safeguard against error — any mistakes are clearly on the record, to be seen and perhaps corrected by future generations.

The Brethren has no answers to offer us about how decision-making works, but it gives us a wealth of information about the Court's deliberative process. Its lesson is that the all-too-human attributes of limited people can be, and are, subordinated to the honest attempt to apply highly abstract ideas in this process. Since politics involves collective decision making, this is information that we who are interested in maintaining that the phrase "the politics of principle" is not self-contradictory would do well to study.

Joan Kennedy Taylor is Senior Editor of *LR*.

History as bunk

JAMES J. MARTIN

America Revised, *by Frances FitzGerald, Little, Brown, 240 pp., $9.95.*

AMERICA REVISED IS A hard book to come to grips with, because its point is complicated. Several themes cross over one another in it, and the reader inevitably follows Frances FitzGerald's succession of sallies into the chaotic jungle which is the American common school and textbook scene with varying degrees of comprehension. Part of this difficulty is due to her book's not being a continuous integrated intellectual project. It was wired and stitched together from previous pieces of magazine journalism, almost all of it from the pages of the *New Yorker*. It is probably a fine book for general readers, but it has various shortcomings from the point of view of any hardened veteran of the academic trenches or anyone else who has delved deeply into historiography as a long-term interest. The absence of a table of contents will bother some; the absence of an index bothered me.

More important, FitzGerald's numerous sweeping generalizations crowd one another for space page after page, the whole being only occasionally lit up by a source reference of more or less relevance. Despite its glowing jacket copy and its blurbs from the likes of John Kenneth Galbraith, the book is quite weak in not going back far enough and showing that the subject under study has a far more venerable ancestry than one might gather from exposure to just this book. FitzGerald might have profited from some heavy attention to some good American histo-

STUART BRATESMAN

Frances FitzGerald, author of *America Revised*—"a succession of sallies into the chaotic jungle which is the American common school and textbook scene"—and the best-seller, *The Fire in the Lake.*

riography such as that of Michael Kraus, and she might have obtained some insights into the whole business of writing history from a woman with vast talents in that industry, Cicely Veronica Wedgwood, in her *Truth and Opinion.* There is nowhere nearly enough attention devoted to college-level history books and their trickle-down impact on the volumes intended for younger readers, or on the related cases in which school and college histories have the same authors. (These latter can provide enchanting historiographical adventures, especially for those interested in hypocrisy and patronization. The multiple-author development is a ploy to maximize adoptions, not to produce more precise and "objective" textbooks.)

FitzGerald has, in fact, hardly stumbled across the material available on the last two decades, the area of her primary interest and concentration; one might say she has only attempted to bring together the minutes of the last meeting. The material available on the continuous rewriting of history since antiquity is massive. Such rewriting is expectable when new facts and sources are uncovered, resulting in expanded and richer accounts of the past. But the kind FitzGerald is most concerned with is revision incorporating new *interpretations* of earlier material. It has been understood for a very long time that every living generation feels a strong inclination to restructure the past for its own comfort, entertainment and sentiments of security. As the famed Carl Becker put it in a March, 1944 essay in the *Yale Review,* "each succeeding generation necessarily regards the past from the point of view of its own peculiar preoccupations and problems." Since these differ from those of the people who preceded them, the past is very likely to take on constantly different significances. But when the contemporary generation begins to tamper with or "fiddle" with the past, as A.J.P. Taylor would put it, dropping inconvenient facts and blurring over jagged and uncomfortable aspects, we arrive at one of the confrontation points of history-making-and-writing.

Though the jacket flaps tell us that FitzGerald has written this work "from no political point of view," its solidly establishment-liberal flavor is transparently obvious throughout. She includes sufficient disclaimers of the nuttier liberal extravagances to give her book at least an appearance of impartiality—not that some of the "right wing" hysteria is any more respectable—and she makes the point that both have done measurable harm to history and have lent much assistance to making the subject dull, boring and seemingly of no consequence to the young, a terrible result in the main. But one thing she fails to get across at all is that the fabrication of school textbooks in history for her entire period of major concern (and well before it, for that matter) has been a nearly 99 percent liberal monopoly, if not racket. It is the liberals' collective excesses, lunacies, idiocies and profound ignorance which dominate the content of these textbooks which FitzGerald criticizes.

America Revised thus could have been made stronger with at least a brief discourse on the evolution of the modern national state, and the school history class and textbook as a means of inculcating nationalistic sentiments. After all, we are living in a period which roughly corresponds to the bicentennial of this national state. It was during the period between the American and French Revolutions when we see the origins of things like national flags, national anthems, conscription, "citizenship," and compulsory schooling and voting. The recent glut of nationalistic emotion in this country, spurred by the events in Iran, and its exploitation in the carefully orchestrated exacerbation of American indignation by television, suggest that though history via school textbooks is a caricature; still, unmistakably, primitive as it is, exposure to it can instill enough residual spinal cord reaction potential to produce these reactions which must be heartwarming to politicians responsible for contemporary policy. The system is still a resounding success, is it not? It is, in fact, little changed from what has

gone on for generations, as the following news item from over 60 years ago attests: "German text books and everything that savors of Fritz will be barred from the Colorado Springs High School and all the public schools during the coming year. The students have refused to have anything further to do with the Germans or anything that pertains to them." (*Colorado Springs Evening Telegraph,* August 7, 1918, p. 10.)

It has seemed to me for a long time that there are several reasons for the persistence of school history textbooks, among them not only the drive among the elders of school children to see to it that a particular version of the past is fed to them, but also on the part of the children the desire to be told pretty stories which contain directives for their present or future behavior. It has long been observed that only a handful at any time are interested in the truth about the past, but a great many want ideas and recommendations for how they should act. C.V. Wedgwood talks about the "old fashioned writer for the young, forever pointing out the lesson as well as telling the story." With all the frenzied and continuous experimentation and faddish casting about with wondrous gimmicks a large part of this is really still with us. FitzGerald's cultivated horror story about the continuing degeneration of American history textbooks I am sure could be outmatched by what the young are being exposed to with respect to world history. But it all may also be seen as a reflection and commentary on certain internal American social conditions.

There is, first, the immense multitude of the clinically or functionally illiterate, the ones who remain in that condition no matter how many diplomas they collect along the way. Second, there are the many boiling ethnic and racial minorities, recognized in these days as quite "unmeltable" in the "melting pot" which American democracy and its school system were meant to achieve three generations ago. FitzGerald finds the school histories mindless, and subscribes to the Hofstadter thesis about a growing anti-intellectualism (as well as non-intellectualism) which is allegedly responsible. Yet one is led to wonder what percentage of the present-day multitudes could handle abstractions even if they were exposed to them, since so many cannot read. A recent Ford Foundation study indicates that nearly 64-million Americans are illiterate and that one third of them are so crippled in this respect that they simply cannot cope in this social system. Phil Donahue on a recent TV talk show had as guests two young people of about 15 who appeared to be reasonably bright; neither of them knew the sum of 6 x 7, who the Vice President was, or how many states were in the USA. Can young people in this condition comprehend a more intellectual school history book?

"The aim of the indoctrination is that those exposed to it derive the proper attitudes and the proper conditioned reflexes. Thus the closing chapters of school histories are crammed with non-historical manipulative tripe."

This leads directly to the other issue mentioned above, the issue of minorities. FitzGerald dwells for some time on the tailoring of recent editions of school histories to the political pressures being applied by minorities. Textbook publishers, like the Supreme Court, follow election returns. This results in trendy experimentation with textbook contents, experiments in which people disappear, to be replaced by "problems." This depersonalization of history then becomes a tool toward the resolution of conflict, and thus brings about the familiar textbook phenomenon of causeless wars and other ghostlike unmotivated confrontations. A second consequence of this "problem" approach is concentration on non-essentials. For example, in one such text, one gets a picture of Cesar Chavez and some migratory field workers in a section on agriculture, but absolutely nothing about Luther Burbank, whose horticultural experiments produced nearly a thousand new plants or varieties of plants, resulted in the production of many billions of dollars of added world agricultural output, and presumably contributed to the improved nutrition of millions. Is the contribution of Cesar Chavez even remotely comparable?

Insofar as FitzGerald describes the disorder thus entered into school history books by minority group pressures, it seems to cause her no discomfort, and she fails entirely to identify the reason for it. The minority political game of one-upmanship in the Historical Atrocities, Mistreatment & Abuse department has much to do with it. Once a group has won a high rating in the resentment-of-past-grievances index, then present advantages can be more resolutely pursued, one of the fruits of which is distortion of history by the inclusion of exaggerations in the achievement and significance sectors. But sometimes the textbook makers do not include genuine attainments in lieu of the pursuit of tried and true traditional ploys; they prefer, for instance, to run still another bleak photograph of a depressed black family leaning on the walls of a wretched tenant farm shack, rather than run a picture of one of the 300 black millionaires Paul Harvey has told us are now a part of the American income picture.

Another serious difficulty arises when these tumultuous minority additions crowd forward to be included in the narrative. The collators of textbooks then have to face the problem of getting various irregularities reconciled, much as Rubens had to do with his portrait of the Gerbier family after several more children were born following the painting of the original. When textbook collators try to reconcile irregularities they typically fail to do it properly, and their product reflects it, becoming more and more an indigestible and jagged collage, beginning nowhere in particular (some of FitzGer- textbooks' attempts to incorporate minority backgrounds are utterly hilarious), ending nowhere in particular, and going nowhere in between.

Furthermore, it is obvious that only certain minorities come out well in this mélange. Most of the bewildering spectrum of ethnic and racial entities which actually makes up the American populace remains unrecognized. The journalist Joseph Sobran has commented amusingly on this phenomenon, entering a mock-complaint about the slighting of

the minority from which he stems, the Ruthenians.

FitzGerald's repeated citations of the imbecilities of local political interference or attempts at same, and the related bubble-headed capers of school authorities and other elected, non-elected and appointed boobs calls to mind the conviction of Mark Twain that the first divine assay at creation produced idiots, and the second, school boards. And to the continuous adulteration of school histories by authors and publishers who are frightened by aggressive minorities and pressure groups (and the thought of diminished sales) into infiltrating successive editions with chapters of trivial filler masquerading as substance and coming out with increasingly unreadable, dreary, boresome, bound waste paper — well, it is perhaps instructive to recall the observation of a quarter of a century ago by William H. Whyte, Jr., in *The Organization Man:* "By default, the anti-intellectual sector of education has been allowed to usurp the word 'democratic' to justify the denaturing of the curriculum, and while liberal arts people may win arguments on this score, the others won the war long ago. Once the uneducated could have the humility of ignorance. Now they are given degrees and put in charge, and this delusion of learning will produce consequences more critical than the absence of it."

What FitzGerald is actually documenting in her book is the collection of 25 to 50 years of negative interest on this educational counterfeit. The debacle of the public schools has been taking shape for some time, though its accelerated pace in recent years has misled some into thinking that it has come about suddenly. But, as Whyte saw, the assumption of the helm by the ignorant — from the Ivy schools and the crossroads leaky-roof hayloft seminaries alike — well before the immense flood of the marginally-educable hit the schools in the late '50s, was the central factor. The ensuing history schoolbooks — half pictures, larger type, briefer sentences, simpler words (predominantly from the most common 900 used in the English language), and even simpler ideas — reflected this new shallow-pated educational "leadership." The schools are mirrors, not beacons.

The final quarter of *America Revised* is hardly concerned with history books at all, but with a survey and analysis of the churning of educational theory among the people and organizations trying to establish what the schools should have been doing over the last 90 years. Included is a treatment of the branches of ignorance camouflaged as "reform" of both texts and classroom procedures, and the pernicious influence of something called "social science" upon history. ("Thou shalt not commit a social science," W.H. Auden said somewhere.) FitzGerald treats this welter of trendy experimentation engagingly and intelligently. And some of the people covered reminded me faintly of those whom I encountered in a job as an attendant in a mental hospital during 1936-37.

Perhaps we might be better off without school history books. But there is little likelihood that the centralizing forces in the modern state would be content to permit "free enterprise" in the study and learning of history—even though that is what is really going on, years after school has ended, for many. The state's common-school sausage-stuffer generally exposes the young to at least some *sentiments* relating to what happened in the past, and therefore to a hazy vagueness as to what America "has been all about," as the cliche goes. And the political establishment at any given moment needs emotionally-based approval in order to function. That few if any ever emerge from this indoctrination with even a rudimentary understanding of history or even with what Henry James called "a sense of the past" is not considered of any real import; the fundamental goal of the indoctrination is that those exposed to it derive the proper attitudes and the proper conditioned reflexes. Thus the closing chapters of the school histories are crammed with non-historical manipulative tripe. Students are assured of having the desired views, though they may never have understood chronology and may have not even the faintest idea of what has taken place, even on a century-to-century basis. I often find people who haven't the dimmest notion as to whether Lincoln preceded Washington or vice versa, and friends who are still in the eraser pits tell me that even recent events such as World War II are as remote to most college youth as Agincourt.

In view of these and far too many other issues to list in any space short of an encyclopedia, it is hard to work up a sense of agitation over what Frances FitzGerald tells us in *America Revised.* If you mistake a zinc rainspout for a hollow tree, and you are a woodpecker, you have a fundamentally flawed conception of the total situation. The same thing can be said for those who think that school history books are primarily intended to assist the young in appreciating and understanding history.

James J. Martin is the author of *American Liberalism and World Politics, Revisionist Viewpoints,* and various other books. He has taught history at the University of Michigan, and is a frequent contributor to *LR.*

Fear and loathing in retrospect

JACK SHAFER

The Great Shark Hunt, *by Hunter S. Thompson, Summit Books, Simon and Schuster, 602 pp., $14.95.*

HUNTER S. THOMPSON gave birth to gonzo journalism in 1970, but the father was a deadline (the greatest muse). *Scanlan's Monthly* had dispatched Thompson and British illustrator Ralph Steadman to cover the Kentucky Derby. In prototypical gonzo fashion the race itself only merited a short one-paragraph description, which it eventually got. The real story lay elsewhere — over 50,000 ravers lined the infield of the track, enjoying acute alcohol toxicity — white-linen suited members of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels busied themselves by barfing into urinals — Steadman drew hideous portraits of bystanders and then made gifts of them to the subjects, a practice Thompson was quick to discourage before somebody took the gift as a "brutal, bilious insult" and horsewhipped Steadman — and Thompson pumped mace into the governor's box. What a story!

But Thompson couldn't write. The entire issue of *Scanlan's* was set in type and ready to roll, waiting for Thompson's story, the cover story. As Thompson later recounted, "...I was having at the time what felt to me like a terminal writer's block, whatever the hell that means." He had himself locked up in a sensory deprivation chamber (a New York hotel suite), but nothing more came of his isolation than a couple of pages. "They were sending copy boys and copy girls and people down every hour to

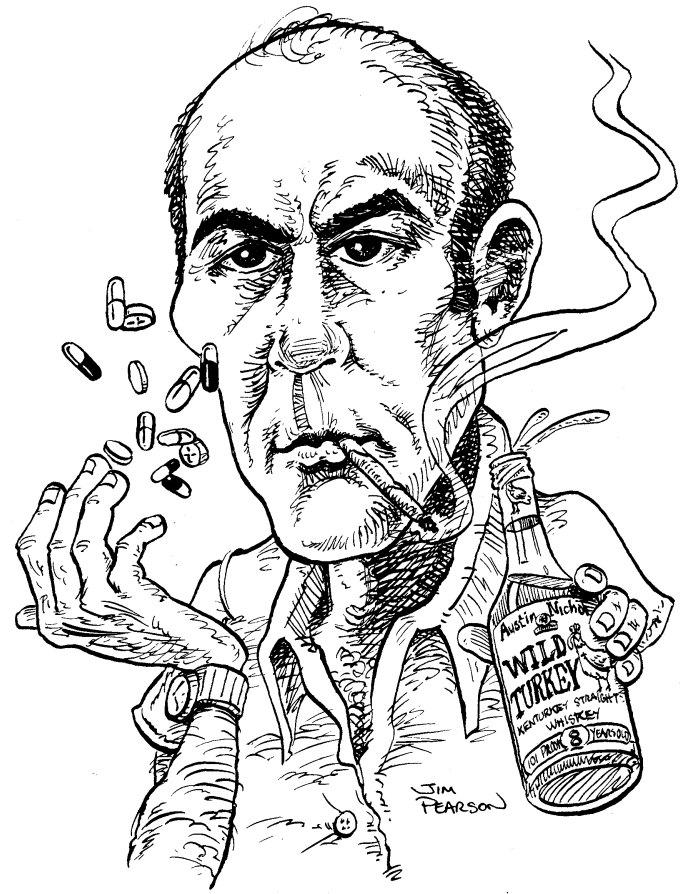
see what I had done, and the pressure began to silently build like a dog whistle kind of scream ... You couldn't hear it but it was everywhere ... Finally I just began to tear the pages out of my notebooks since I write constantly in the notebooks and draw things, and they were legible. But they were hard to fit in the telecopier. We began to send just torn pages."

Thompson sat back and waited for his editor's wrath to upchuck the whole mess right back out of the telecopier. No such wrath came. Thompson ventured a cautious call to his editor. "Oh yeah. It's wonderful stuff ... wonderful," the editor said. He was keen for more of the same. Like any good writer Thompson took his editor's advice and fed the rest of his notebook to the insatiable telecopier. Editor's ink and Steadman's own pen and ink resulted in "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," a gonzo tribute to our "whole doomed atavistic culture."

Gonzo. It ain't in Webster's. The gonzo method of paranoia, exaggeration, black humor, fantasy, vengeance, violence, large-bore revolvers, squealing tires, and a devotion to twisting reality to suit his purposes, be it with an IBM Selectric or ingested chemicals, has served Thompson well. Out of gonzo Thompson has fashioned a literary style which rings as unique a note as Dashiell Hammett's hardboiled style or Herman Melville's metaphysical style. As with Hammett and Melville, Thompson's success has spawned imitators, but none of them write with the sheer imagination of the originator. Thompson writes like a runaway lawnmower. Gas him up on Wild Turkey, mescaline, and speed. Nudge him in a general editorial direction. Like a renegade Toro he will down hedges, prematurely harvest the garden, and devour the neighbor's poodle, slapping guts and bone splinters into the air.

Sports Illustrated once gave such an editorial nudge, requesting a 250-word caption for a Las Vegas motorcycle race. In Los Angeles Thompson and his "300-pound Samoan attorney" ladened a Chevy Impala convertible with ether, Budweiser, LSD, heroin, weed, cocaine, and adrenochrome extract from live human adrenal glands, and aimed it at Las Vegas ("what Berlin would have looked like if the Nazis had won"). The caption never got written — Thompson and his attorney were too busy fending off attacks by winged lizards in the Mohave desert, battling drug-induced psychosis, glad-handing narcotics officers at the national narcs convention, and evading bills and arrest. That adventure, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," came out of the gonzo funnel as a demented Huck and Tom story — dark, dangerous, sardonic.

The American Political Experience came next, with Thompson warming up for the big leagues by running for Sheriff in Aspen, Colorado, on the Freak Power ticket whose platform promised to sod all the streets, change the name of the town to "Fat City" (to "prevent greedheads, land-rapers and other human jackals from capitalizing on the name 'Aspen' "), erect a bastinado platform and a set of stocks to punish dishonest dope dealers, and use wild wolverines to help keep the peace. Landslide defeat whetted Thompson's appetite for the Big Cakewalk, the 1972 presidential campaign. He tore through the campaign like a golf cart racing through hell, divorcing himself from the Pack Journalists, and throwing-in with the "Acid, Amnesty, and Abortion" McGovern campaign. His biweekly reports for *Rolling Stone* respected none of the off-the-record courtesies professional journalists must maintain to keep their sources flowing. Thompson purposely burned bridges behind him — he only intended to take this ride once.



Hunter S. Thompson

In the course of the campaign Thompson rendered such valuable public services as describing Hubert H. Humphrey as "a gutless old ward-healer who should be packed into a bottle and sent out with the Japanese Current." He also lent his press ticket to a spasmodic drunk who boarded the Muskie Florida campaign train and unhinged Big Ed. Untainted by modesty, Thompson bragged of being the first to publicly compare Richard Nixon to Adolf Hitler. And the limits of libel law were tested as Thompson alleged that he and John Chancellor dropped acid together and that Walter Cronkite dealt in the white slavery market. Between gonzo outbursts like this Thompson got closer to the mechanics of the nut-busting, 18-month long, cross-continent, idiot's marathon of presidential campaigning than anyone, dispensing enough hard reportage to earn the praise, envy, and hatred of most of the press corps. The campaign was a big stakes game for Thompson as he won all but two of the fifty bets he made between February and November, betting against McGovern in New Hampshire and for him on November 7. *Fear and Loathing On the Campaign Trail '72* made it to hardcover, and with its publication Thompson became the mescaline Teddy White, cranking out history which was not always accurate but was always true.

The Watergate Summer blessed Thompson with the material to finish the *Campaign Trail '72* story. Gonzo ain't gonzo without revenge, and Richard Nixon ("a Cheapjack Punk," "a congenital thug," "a fixer," "a Lust-Maddened Werewolf") gave Thompson that

opportunity. He had been kicking Nixon long before he was down ("a walking embarrassment to the human race"), and now that Dick was down, "lashing around in bad trouble," Thompson took stiletto-boot shots at the "frightened, unprincipled little shyster." The Doctor of Gonzo wrote,

> Six months ago Richard Nixon was Zeus himself, calling firebombs and shitrains down on friend and foe alike—the most powerful man in the world, for a while—but all that is gone now and nothing he can do will ever bring a hint of it back. Richard Nixon's seventh crisis will be his last. He will go down with Harding and Grant as one of America's classically rotten presidents.

Which is exactly what he deserves—

"Fear and Loathing at the Watergate: Mr. Nixon Has Cashed His Check." More like bounced his last check, but the distinction is a fine one. Ironically, the decline of Richard Nixon was paralleled by the decline of Hunter S. Thompson. After single-handedly hounding a President out of the White House, what subject could possibly be worth Thompson's talents? A goddamn fishing contest in Mexico ("The Great Shark Hunt")? An obituary for his 300-pound Samoan attorney ("The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat")? The endorsement of a grinning-airhead Trilateral Commission delivery-boy for the presidency ("Jimmy Carter and the Great Leap of Faith")? Noooooooooo! Garry Trudeau got the wise idea first, transforming Hunter S. Thompson into the fictitious Uncle Duke and sending him off to American Samoa as Governor, China as Ambassador, and Iran as bag-man. Thompson got the wise idea second. Weary or perhaps bored with living fantasies, he has turned Hollywood screenwriter and a movie starring Bill Murray as a Thompsonesque journalist is due for 1980 release. Thompson is cashing the checks now, and they are signed by Universal Pictures. Pay me to fantasize, Thompson must be thinking, and let some other pitiful geek live the twisted things. Here's hoping the checks Thompson is cashing don't bounce on his readers.

So Simon and Schuster has published the Hunter S. Thompson Omnibus, His Greatest Hits, whatever you want to call it. They call it *The Great Shark Hunt* and have seen fit to put it in binding that would shame even the Book-of-the-Month Club. There is just one Ralph Steadman drawing and that's on the dustjacket. Not a single Steadman drawing from the original magazine publications is included—which is like publishing the definitive *Alice in Wonderland* without the John Tenniel drawings.

But what the hell. There is plenty of Thompson's pregonzo apprentice work from his *National Observer* days, stuff that proves that he can write traditional journalism with either end of the pyramid turned up. Thompson's art has always been guided by the principle that the story of getting the story is always more important than the story itself. Not one of the 50-odd entries betrays that principle.

For Thompson enthusiasts *The Great Shark Hunt* will be a true feeding frenzy. But let the non-initiated be forewarned: Hunter S. Thompson considers Joseph Conrad as one of literary history's great humorists. It is the darkness of the soul, the evil joy of the Hell's Angels, the mad dog ethics of politics and pro football, and consciousness stretched like taffy by drugs, pain, and death that Thompson covers. It's a tough beat.

Jack Shafer writes frequently for *LR*.

Militarist's daydream

KARL E. PETERJOHN

The Third World War, by General Sir John Hackett, Air Chief Marshall, Sir John Barraclough, Sir Bernard Burrow, Brigadier Kenneth Hunt, Vice Admiral Sir Ian McGeoch, Norman Macrae, and Major General John Stawson. Macmillan, 368 pp., $12.95.

THE FUTURE IS ABOUT as clear as fog rolling in from the ocean. Human fascination with what will be, or what may be, has opened up whole new vistas in literature; and science fiction, an often denigrated literary form, has recently become almost acceptable among highbrow critics. Creating an entirely new society and establishing unique values for it, while weaving a plot into this mosaic has become an appreciated art, after years of neglect and opprobrium.

An abbreviated version of this kind of futurological speculation has now developed. Instead of creating an entirely new society, the author begins with a premise of "what if?" Len Deighton did this with his novel, *SS-GB*, based upon a successful German invasion of England during World War II. Instead of looking at the past and postulating from it, General Sir John Hackett and his military co-authors from Great Britain have explored the not too distant future, close enough so that its already bestselling message will be bandied about as the SALT treaty takes over center stage in the public's awareness.

The Third World War is not a novel in the conventional sense (after all, how many novels have an index?). Rather, it is a polemical argument for high defense spending and international containment by the US. Accordingly, I would like to leave literary considerations aside for the moment to examine the world scenario which is presented.

The world is not a pleasant place when the book opens in 1984. And then it gets worse. The Russians are back in the catbird's seat in Egypt. The leader of the communist states in the Caribbean is Jamaica which, with Cuba, is fighting for the liberation of South Africa (Rhodesia is now ruled by a black despot). Conflicts between Arabs are increascreasingly possible as are threats to Middle Eastern oil. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh may go at one another at any time. The Russian satellites of eastern Europe are restless, particularly the Poles.

It is an interesting scene, and in many ways not unlike many of the events which have occurred in the past. The only area where Hackett and company go astray is in assuming that the Shah of Iran would still be in control in the '80s. The starting point where borders are crossed occurs, just as it did in World War I, in the Balkans. Yugoslavia is invaded by the Russians. Although Tito is never mentioned, and has presumably passed from the scene, this is straight out of a post-Tito scenario many conservatives have mentioned. The invasion becomes the first action of World War III. Americans are brought into the fighting there. Russia issues an ultimatum to West Germany and backs it up with the promise that Warsaw Pact forces will enter the country to prevent the Germans from gaining nuclear weapons. Italy too is told that it will be neutralized. The Russians promise not to use nuclear weapons in their drive into western Europe, so the main battle ground becomes West Germany.

After fixing the scene for this confrontation, the au-

thors have a serious problem. Can they let the Soviets and their allies walk all over NATO? Can they show NATO easily repulsing the Soviets? Would a stalemate be acceptable to the readers? The answer to all three questions is no. It puts the authors in a curious position, since as advocates of higher defense spending, more soldiers, the draft, and new weapon systems, they have to face the dilemma of a plausible plot. First, if NATO is walked over by the Warsaw Pact, it not only reflects on the military and their equipment, but goes against their pride. But even if the authors were willing to let this happen it puts them in the position of having the West use nuclear weapons first, which is unacceptable.

If NATO wins easily, the question could easily become, why do we need to devote all these resources for defense? Why would the Russians be foolish enough to attack when they are faced with unrest in the satellite states? Why indeed? The stalemate option on a conventional battlefield leads to escalation, and ultimately to nuclear exchanges. Actually nuclear exchanges would be led to almost inevitably if any of these scenarios were closely examined.

So what can the authors do? Hackett et al. need to combine enough action, suspense, and success for the good guys with the basic purpose of the book, which is to increase military spending. So they add a little Warsaw walkover, with an eventual stalemate, a couple of nuclear detonations (but not enough to blow up the world) and an internal Russian coup d'etat. The good guys win, but only after much struggle, and the vital assistance of new weapons systems developed in the late 1970s and beefed up NATO manpower.

Obviously the premise the authors start from is flawed. But, part of the scenario leading up to the Soviet invasion is more plausible: "In the USSR the harvest was expected to be even more disastrous than those of the previous two years and critical foodstuffs were known to be scarce. The measures which, in the recent past, had produced waves of unrest in Poland and Romania and even in parts of the Soviet Union itself—in the Ukraine, for example, and in Georgia—were likely to be repeated." Unrest is widespread among the Asian republics of the Soviet Union too. This is hardly the prime time to strike, but under the plot the authors have developed the Soviets do so.

No one doubts that the Soviets try to take advantage of any situation which occurs around the world; they have been unceremoniously booted out of many countries. Where they remain they are often hated, such as in most of eastern Europe, and the countries being aided, like Cuba, are a constant drain on the USSR's overextended economy. In other words, the authors mix up their premises to reach a satisfactory conclusion. This is not surprising; politicians do it all the time. If they did not provide sufficient reason for this shake up in the Soviet power structure they would have no way of resolving the scenario without a massive nuclear exchange, where an overwhelming percentage of these "limited war" scenarios end.

As literature the book is also flawed. There really aren't any memorable characters. One is given glimpses of particular individuals, a good-guy German tank commander, an American merchant marine sailor, an Afrikander, all briefly take center stage, and in a page or two are gone. The President of the U.S. is just a name. The faceless troglodytes who rule the Kremlin remain obscure even as they are deposed. Reader interest is sought by rushing from particular event to event using the reader's general disposition to root for his fellow countryman and their allies the way you root for U.S. Olympic athletes. The individuals, the destruction, the chaos of war become obscured by this intensely impersonal approach.

However, these flaws are irrelevant to the book's success, which will be measured in its ability to mobilize more tax dollars for MX missiles, XM-1 tanks, additional anti-tank weapons, more divisions, more ships, more anti-submarine planes, etc. etc. And judging from the rave reviews from England contained on the book's jacket, the authors will be successful. What will be completely overlooked is the likelihood that any conflict such as the authors have designed will ultimately end in a massive nuclear exchange. The result of such an exchange is not given in this book. Or even considered.

Karl E. Peterjohn is a free-lance writer and a former newspaperman.

Adolescent dystopia

MICHAEL GROSSBERG

Alongside Night, *by J. Neil Schulman, Crown, 181 pp., $8.95.*

HERE IS A BOOK THAT seems to have everything, a science fiction disaster novel with an important, original, and timely subject: the destruction of America by runaway inflation. It is acclaimed by leading authors, from Poul Anderson to Anthony Burgess. Moreover, it has an explicitly libertarian theme: the inevitably detrimental effects of statism. Unhappily, what *Alongside Night,* by J. Neil Schulman, does *not* have is credible characters or a convincing plot. It may be good propaganda, but it is bad melodrama.

Science fiction, at its best, is a literature of ideas. All too often, it consists almost *exclusively* of ideas: as if a mad scientist designed the human body, giving it a brain (theme), but no skeleton (plot) or heart (flesh and blood characters). Like too much bad science fiction, *Alongside Night* has imaginative ideas, inadequately fleshed out.

Schulman envisions a future New York in which inflation, wage-price controls, and the collapse of government services have led to the development of a burgeoning countereconomy. It is a 1999 filled with Blues, brownies, vendies, tziganes, Gloamingers, Tasers, Project Harriman, and the Genghis Khan—that is, respectively, (1) hastily engraved New Dollars resembling, and worth about as much as, Monopoly money; (2) Harry Browne-outs who head for the hills with their rifles and survival foods; (3) federal tokens replacing dimes and quarters that

have been "greshamed" out of exchange; (4) gypsy cab drivers; (5) religious fanatics who believe that God is a human, on earth "at this very moment," but unfortunately suffering from amnesia; (6) nonlethal, purely defensive, electrical-dart paralyzers; (7) a black market lunar mining venture a la Heinlein; and (8) the latest rage in New Barbarian fashion: a coat of metallic-silver leather, trimmed with long black monkey fur.

Some of Schulman's bits of fancy are refreshingly witty, but one suspects this "novel of 1999" just may be a parody of contemporary society. Cinema cabarets showing continuous-run Humphrey Bogart or Marx Brothers movies have replaced most dinner theatres, stand-up comics, and dance bands, thanks to the nostalgia craze and the proliferation of videodiscs and wall-screens. Popular television series include *Presidential Healer,* about a President who cures his subjects by faith-healing, and *Hello, Joe—Whaddya Know?,* the adventures of a gorilla named Joe—the product of primate educational research—who becomes a philosophy professor.

But Schulman's greatest flair is for the creative projection of future libertarian institutions. He imagines a black market so diversified that an entire chain of secret shopping malls—variously styled Aurora, Autonomy, Auction, Austrian School, Aum, etc. (AU being the acronym of the Agorist Underground as well as the chemical symbol for gold)—has grown, forming, quite literally, an underground economy. These hidden agoras, or marketplaces, offer a bustling labyrinth of unusual facilities where countereconomic traders meet to do business: No-State Insurance, The Contraband Exchange, Identities by Charles (makeup and disguises), The American Letter Mail Company (Lysander Spooner, founder), and The G. Gerald Rhoames Border Guard and Ketchup Company (a "cannabist" or marijuana salesman). Unlike the very worst sort of polemical novel, in which the action freezes while the characters expound upon the author's philosophy, *Alongside Night* presents its libertarianism embedded in the very fabric of daily life:

"To applaud a work of fiction only for its libertarian values is to betray those values by swelling the sphere of politics until it engulfs the sphere of esthetics."

> Fifth Avenue at night was even busier than in daytime.... Each night ... the avenue was closed off to all motorized traffic except the electric patrol carts of Fifth Avenue Merchant Alliance—and FAMAS had justified the privilege. By totally ignoring any nonviolent, non-invasive behavior—no matter how outrageous or vulgar—and concentrating exclusively on protecting its clients and their customers from attacks and robbery, FAMAS made Fifth Avenue a safe haven from the city's pervasive street violence. Anything else went, from sexual displays of every sort to the street merchandising of neo-opiates or — for several hours, at least, your own personal slave....
>
> Nor was this discouraged by the avenue's property owners. They knew it was precisely this atmosphere that attracted their customers. Neither did the city government interfere; its own OTB gambling casinos on the avenue were one of the city's few remaining reliable sources of revenue—and more than one city council member had secret business interests in the enclave. ... As a result, Fifth Avenue had evolved into the center of the city's nightlife.

Yet Schulman's libertarian landscapes remain only painted backdrops since the hero of *Alongside Night,* Elliot Vreeland, fails to come to life. And a multitude of ingenious little touches, no matter how imaginative, do not add up to one absorbing tale, when the story itself is inherently implausible. Sad to say, as an aspiring, futuristic political adventure thriller, *Alongside Night* is a beautiful still life.

For one thing, Elliot is a two-dimensional character. We don't know more, or care more, about him at novel's end than at its beginning. Schulman shamelessly manipulates his hero, resorting to that tired old sf trick of making him an Elliot-in-Wonderland: a conveniently wide-eyed, wet behind the ears innocent that hack authors use to Show and Tell the ABC's of their illusive worlds. Believe it or not, the son of a world-famous free market economist, a student to whom "economics is ... a hobby," doesn't seem to know the first thing about elementary libertarianism! Sophisticated science fiction tries to make the familiar strange and the strange (to the readers) familiar (to the characters). By contrast, *Alongside Night* is a doubtful world in which the natives act like tourists, shocked by the familiar institutions and customs of their own time and place!

We are also expected to swallow a story so contrived it depends on a series of unlikely coincidences. Elliot, a senior at a classy Manhattan prep school, is catapulted into the forefront of a revolutionary conspiracy when his family disappears, abducted by the State, and Elliot sets out to find them. One day he's turning in homework assignments on "The Self-Destruction of the Capitalist System;" overnight he's transformed into a savior of free enterprise.

He's in all the right places at all the right times. Thrust by "accident" into a Citizens for a Free Society rally, Elliot becomes the catalyst for a riot that prompts EUCOMTO (the new laissez faire European Common Market) to stop the exchange of New Dollars for eurofrancs, a move which in turn ushers in the fall of the American State. If only current libertarian demonstrations had such impact!

In short, *Alongside Night* is impossible to take seriously as adult literature. But wait. That's it! An adult couldn't take this melodrama seriously ... but maybe an adolescent can. Put yourself in Elliot's place for a moment. Imagine. Your own high school is exposed as the national headquarters of an anarchist conspiracy! Your hated teacher is unmasked as a government agent, sent especially to spy on you! Your best friend proves to be the son of the guerrilla leader of the Revolutionary Agorist Cadre! Your girlfriend — Lorimer, the very first woman you met in the Agorist Underground—turns out to be the daughter of the villainous chief of the American secret police! To top it all off, your own father is acknowledged by the whole world to be the Last Best Hope for Mankind — and you are *his* Last Best Hope!!

What we have here is a typically hyperinflated adolescent wet dream. Elliot acts out a Walter Mitty wish-fulfillment fantasy easily shared by today's generation of latently libertarian teenagers: young people fed up with compulsory public schools and a corrupt government, suspicious of the establishment, and looking for answers. *Alongside Night* is an unconsciously written juvenile science fic-

tion novel, an attempt to portray that archetypal rite of passage, in which a boy becomes a man. Only this can make sense of the adolescent characterization, the melodramatic plotting, the sophomoric humor, the awkward, embarrassed sex. It is just the kind of truly subversive, socially redeeming literature that young people — the younger the better — need.

Alongside Night also has the dubious honor of being the libertarian movement's first *roman a clef.* Elliot's father is a Nobel Prize-winning free market economist and staunch supporter of a not-very-limited government, famous for an unreadable technical treatise on 1920's economic history and notorious for his monetary theories, who persists in holding radical libertarians at arm's length while naively advising the State in a doomed attempt to reform it. In fact, Dr. Martin Vreeland bears such a suspiciously close resemblance to a certain real-life economist that Schulman finds it necessary to disavow any such resemblance in his preface.

Coincidentally, I should note that Milton Friedman's high opinion of the book is prominently featured on its back cover, along with lavish acclaim from Jerry Pournelle, Poul Anderson, Thomas Szasz, and Anthony Burgess. Reading between the lines of their praise confirms the novel's defects; more important, it reveals a major deficiency in recent libertarian literary criticism. What they *don't* say is at least as significant as what they do say.

For example, Szasz suggests: "It might be, and ought to be, the *Atlas Shrugged* of the 80's." Here is an intriguingly ambiguous statement. Is it an esthetic comment or a political endorsement? If the first, it is difficult to surmise Szasz's meaning, since he has never told us his opinion of *Atlas Shrugged,* or for that matter, any of Rand's works. To be sure, the two novels *can* be equated. Both dystopias present the collapse of civilization and demonstrate its collectivist cause. Each novel contains a Galt's Gulch or Agorist Underground to which hardcore libertarians can repair. Finally, of course, both novels are libertarian. I suspect it was this latter similarity that caught Szasz's attention. Certainly, he could not have been making a *literary* comparison of the two novels. If he had, Szasz could have come to only one conclusion: *Atlas Shrugged* will be the *Atlas Shrugged* of the 80's.

Burgess's reflections are even more revealing: "It is a remarkable... story, and the picture it presents of an inflation-crippled America ... is all too acceptable. I wish, and so will many novelists, that I, or they, had thought of the idea first." I also wish Burgess had thought of the idea first. Judging from *A Clockwork Orange,* his superbly stylized and brilliantly plotted classical liberal/humanist masterpiece, Burgess, unlike Schulman, has the artistic genius and maturity to take the original idea and libertarian ideology of *Alongside Night* and fashion something wonderful from it.

Let us not confuse a good idea — or a good ideology — with a bad novel. The critics of *Alongside Night* have let their enthusiasm for the premise and polemics of Schulman's novel carry away their objectivity. In their haste to encourage any sign of libertarianism, however remote, in the popular culture, they have only succeeded in confounding esthetics and politics.

This novel is being acclaimed not for its artistry, but for its ideology. It is being recommended not because it is literature, but because it is libertarian. Surely, the concept of "libertarian" art is as wrong-headed as the concept of "libertarian" checkers or "libertarian" physics. There is only winning at checkers or losing at checkers, reasonable science and pseudoscience, good art or bad art. *Alongside Night* is bad art, a failed science fiction novel which threatens to come to life, but never quite succeeds.

Conversely, the critical response to this novel is a living horror story, a true Frankenstein haunting the libertarian movement. There is something monstrous here, something more than the usual libertarians playing literary politics — what Jeff Riggenbach has described (in the March, 78 *LR*) as the inevitable tendency of any movement to engage in "the publishing, reviewing, promoting and advertising of each other's books." No, the Frankenstein I fear is the politicization of art — what I once disdainfully described (but no more!) as the Marxist disease.

If libertarianism is anything, it is the stubborn refusal to submit to that most pervasive and destructive trend of our time, the politicization of society. Libertarians, of all people, ought to be extraordinarily sensitive to the truth that once politics becomes the measure of all things, then not only art, but all values — liberty also — suffer. Hence to applaud a work of fiction only for its libertarian values is to betray libertarian values, because it is to swell obscenely the sphere of politics until it engulfs the sphere of esthetics.

In our pursuit of one necessary value — human freedom — we should not disown our need — not as libertarians, but as human beings — for personal and social values beyond politics. We must grant art its own terms and its own standards, never imposing on it a narrowly conceived political standard, libertarian or otherwise. Libertarians must value art, if they value it at all, for the delight it (potentially) offers, never using it merely as a means to the end of our own ideological goals. To vindicate art for our own sake is not to vitiate libertarian politics or the value of libertarian revolution. As Herbert Read, anarchist and art critic, explained long ago:

> It is not that art is incompatible with revolution — far from it. Nor do I suggest that art has no specific part to play in a revolutionary struggle. I am not defending art for art's sake.... Art as I have defined it is so intimately linked to the vital forces of life that it carries society toward ever new manifestation of that life.... Art *is* revolution, and art can best serve revolution by remaining true to itself.

This is the decade libertarianism will become a popular fad. F. Paul Wilson ends his *Reason* review of Schulman's novel with the hope it sells 20 million copies. It may well happen, but I hope not. In the long run, bad melodrama makes for poor propaganda. Indeed, Schulman's implausible plot and unconvincing characters could have the unintended effect of confirming the American public's worst misconception of libertarianism: that it is a utopia that can never be brought down to earth as a practical way of life for real people.

Yet Schulman, a 26-year-old longtime libertarian activist, does have talent. For a first novel, *Alongside Night* is impressive and imaginative, if inadequate. Schulman's second novel (now in progress) is *The Carnal Commandment,* about a future draft of women. Here's hoping it will be of such literary worth that even if it weren't libertarian, it would merit recognition in these pages.

Michael Grossberg is a Friend of the Prometheus Awards Committee which judges the best libertarian science fiction of the year.

UNITED ARTISTS

Peter Sellers, as the "guileless, unacculturated" Chauncey Gardiner, who inadvertently becomes famous in Hal Ashby's *Being There,* with Shirley MacLaine.

On View

Last Chance

DAVID BRUDNOY

YOU KNOW THAT GUY, the great conversationalist? The one who listens so well? Still waters run deep. The strong, silent man earns my vote. Clothes make the man. It's not what you know, it's who you know that matters. While you're up, get me a Grant's. Those long, pregnant pauses speak volumes ... and with a face as honest, with eyes as clear, with a smile as innocent as *that,* he'll go as far as he likes. Being there, he belongs there, and from there, the sky's the limit.

Hal Ashby's *Being There* offers as its hero a man so simple, so guileless, so unacculturated, so much a product of what he has seen on television, the only world outside his (literal) garden that he has known, so little the sum of a normal man's parts, that he must be taken either as moron or genius. Since the subject of Jerzy Kosinski's novel, closely transposed to the screen, is in fact the nearest thing going to moronic, to take him as such wouldn't make much of a story. Unless, like the title character in *Charly,* he's somehow souped up to the genius range. But that's been done. What hasn't been done, recently, is what *Being There* does so remarkably well, with a deft balance between the comic and the poignant. This is the story of a gardener named Chance, who has lived all his life, for reasons never quite given, within the house of an old man, tended nicely by the black maid, unleashed upon a garden to make it bloom, and presented by his keeper, or master, or employer, with hand-me-down TV sets, through which he experiences life. And knows the shame of ring around the collar.

Chance the gardener is turned out of his pleasant hermetic world when the old man dies, and wandering through the streets of a now-ghettoized section of Washington, DC, he falls quite by accident into the path of a nice lady with a large limousine, a dying husband, and a mansion as big as Rhode Island. The lady, Eve Rand, asks Chance his name, as he watches TV in her car. She gets it just slightly off, thinks that she has heard "Chauncey Gardiner" — he has told her, quite truthfully, both his name and his trade—and in Chauncey Gardiner, dressed to the nines in one of his late employer's immaculate suits, there is born a sage.

Because he has absolutely nothing to say, except about gardening, Eve's husband, Benjamin Rand, takes Chauncey Gardiner to his bosom, introduces him to President Bobby, which encounter makes of Chauncey Gardiner the latest rage on television and at the embassy parties and leads him in short order to the very threshhold of greatness. Or at least celebrity. Daniel Boorstin once defined celebrity as the quality of being known for being known. All good things come to those who appear to deserve them: renown, love, adulation, everything. Chauncey Gardiner, being there, belongs there.

Being There is a one-joke item that stretches, without seeming to do so, to just slightly over two hours, and Peter Sellers manages so consistently to maintain his character's one-dimensionality that everyone swirling about him, and all that lands upon him, and everything that is assumed to be the reality of him, appear as natural, as inevitable, as his simplest forecasting of the turning of the seasons. For as Chance tells Benjamin, and as he tells the President of the United States, and as he tells Ambassador Vladimir Skrapinov of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and as he tells all America on a close approximation of Johnny Carson's show, after spring comes summer, and then, in their time, autumn and winter, too. Read into that a cheery analysis of economic recovery, read into that a merry endorsement of détente, read into that *anything,* and everybody does just that.

Chance is absolutely literal. He has been tutored by "Road Runner" and taught the values of America by soap flakes commercials, and his instinctive reaction to anything said to him, anything asked of him, is taken either as metaphor or as exquisitely honed subtle humor. A chap brought to

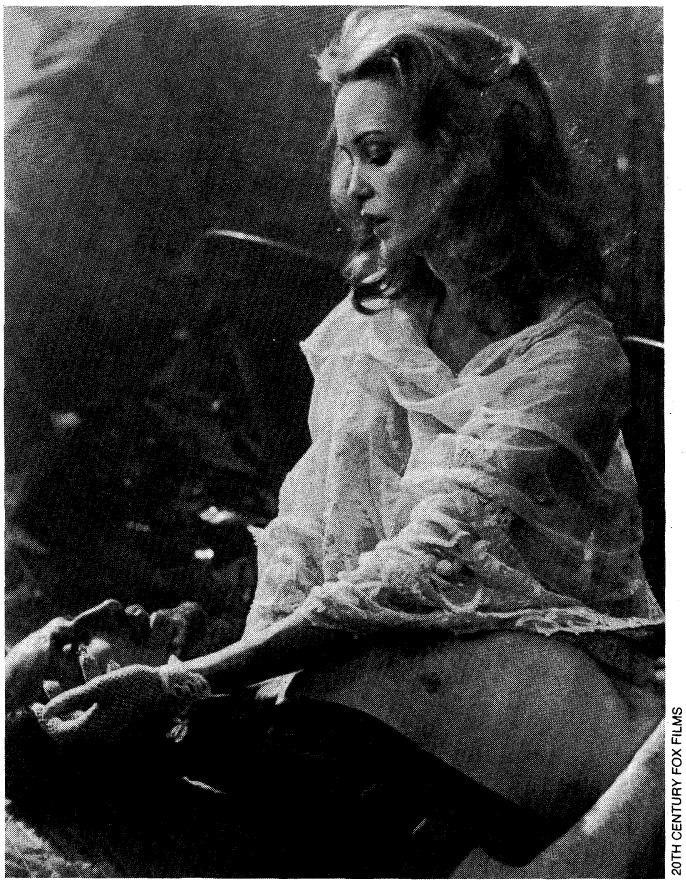
the Russian Embassy by the wife of America's most influential zillionaire, who smiles when the Ambassador tosses off a phrase in Russian, obviously must know Russian perfectly. As well, of course, as eight other languages. A man who tells that same lady, when she comes to throw herself at him and asks what he likes, that likes to "watch," which means to him watch television, must surely mean watch her masturbate. And she does, while *he* watches more television. Such a lover! A man who talks to America in the vocabulary of a twelve-year-old through a medium allegedly geared to the twelve-year-old mentality must be the ultimate, the consummate master of popular communication, and if that, why not the great hope for his country?

And what if this Mr. Gardiner has no past? If his pedigree doesn't pop out of the presidential computers? Rank incompetence on the part of the intelligence agencies! "What do you mean he's got no background? I quoted him on national television today! He's a very well known man!"

Being There slid into New York and Hollywood at the tail end of the year, only now landing in the provinces, thus too late to fit into most of those requisite best-of-the-year lists. But the film bursts with merit. Shirley MacLaine and Melvyn Douglas are, respectively, sensuous and outrageously opinionated as the Rands; and Jack Warden's President Bobby, who can't perform with the First Lady, so excited is he by his brilliant new find, the economics wizard Gardiner, carries satire as far as it can go before the characterization lapses into buffoonery. At the center of this world of mistaken identity stands, barely moving except to switch channels, scarcely modulating an emotion except as he might have seen it portrayed on the tube, Peter Sellers's Chance, a.k.a. Chauncey Gardiner. Sellers never misses a beat. He has nowhere to go, nothing to do, no wants except a nice garden to tend, no experiences to draw on to dislodge his equanimity: this Chance passes leisurely through life, and *Being There* accommodates itself to his pace.

The movie is funny because of what happens to Chance; it is often heartrending because of what Chance happens to be. Peter Sellers, liberated at last from *Pink Panther* sequelitis, shows here his mastery of persona. He must at once act like a dimwit and inspire in others the belief that he is astoundingly complex. Sellers must put before us a man who has enough holes in his background to run Amtrak through, while never causing us to doubt for an instant that his wholly unintended charade could go on forever. The universe out there, out of his garden, never bothers to listen, at least never stays put long enough to interpret what is manifest: that a simpleton is a simpleton. But is the success of Chauncey Gardiner *really* so implausible in a country that took Jimmy Carter straight?

All That Jazz is fabulous, too, a fable for our time as well as an astoundingly fine movie. Joe Gideon is Mercury himself compared to Chance's stately calm, and this thinly disguised—hell, virtually *un*disguised—Bob Fosse autobiography is, like *Being There,* entirely out of the stream of conventional cinema fare these days. It is an extended flashback from death, of the over-working, over-playing, over-extending of a monumental ego. Told through dance, song, dialogue, spectacle, allegory, the swift decline of a brilliantly talented man from vigor to rigor mortis becomes in Fosse's hands an exhilarating excursion into precisely the other side of that make-believe world



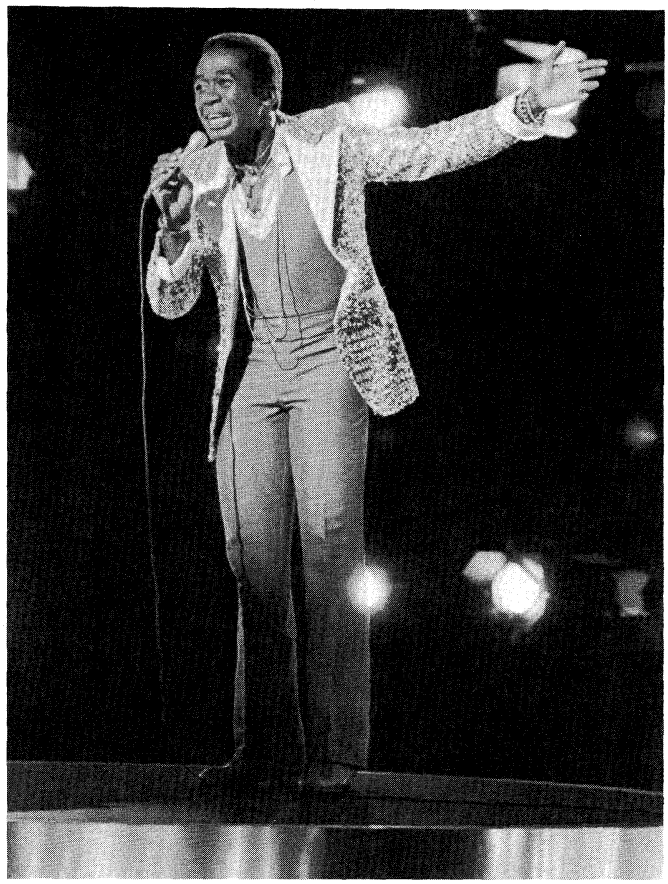
20TH CENTURY FOX FILMS

Jessica Lange as Angelique and Roy Scheider as Joe Gideon, the "scrappy, funny and graceful" anti-hero of *All That Jazz.*

that has formed all, however little there is, of Chance the gardener. Image is all, hoopla is king, glitter bedecks plaster, and there's no business like snow-job business. You can imagine Chance casually flipping the dial with his remote control gizmo, coming at last to a Joe Gideon production, and settling in with it for the evening. The films have nothing whatever in common, other than their excellence, but the worlds they depict are impossible without each other. Chance couldn't thrive without Joe Gideon, Joe Gideon couldn't triumph in a spectacle-starved America without Chance and all the Chances out there, glued to what they're witnessing, absorbing, admiring, emulating.

Joe Gideon is everything Bob Fosse is, except, at least as of this writing, dead. He is endlessly re-editing a film about a night-club comic (*Lenny*), he is casting a new show by winnowing out the dross (*Chorus Line*), he is rehearsing a magnificent new stage production and horrifying the stuffy money men with his erotic numbers, he is driving his mistress nuts and fitting his brief affairs into the slots between the rest of his doings, he is trying to be a good father to his daughter and a pleasant ex-husband to his ex-wife, and he is keeping all his balls in the air simultaneously by popping uppers. Dexedrine, something for the hang-over, drops for red eye, and a masochistic leap into the cold shower: the days begin alike. They end alike. He ends.

All That Jazz reaches farther than it can grasp, but even in the lapses it thrills by daring. We are at one moment with the teenage Joe Gideon in white tie and tails in a sleazy club, tap dancing to drunks, teased by chippies; in the next minute we are furiously rushing to keep up with the adult Joe Gideon as he races through his



20TH CENTURY FOX FILMS

Ben Vereen as O'Conner Flood, in Bob Fosse's autobiographical film, *All That Jazz.*

twenty-eight-hour days; we are suddenly with him and a gorgeous lady dressed all in white, a lady who may be Death or may not be Death, but whatever she is she's not of this planet. It is too much, at least too much to encompass wholly, without some roughage. The most elaborately staged sequence in the movie is Joe's death, MC'ed by an unctuous Negro modeled cruelly on Sammy Davis, Jr., choreographed in and around the operating room where, at last, Joe's too tightly-strung life gives up the ghost. Well, not the ghost; the corpse of Joe Gideon observes, and the spirit of Joe Gideon observes the corpse of Joe Gideon observing, and the friends and family and exploiters and fans of Joe Gideon dance gaily on.

Fosse's lover while he was making the movie, Ann Reinking, plays Gideon's lover: she has been Fosse's star dancer before, she is his prime support here. Jessica Lange, last seen making the latest *King Kong* weep, has little to do, as Angelique (who may or may not be the angel of Death), but make Death look like the neatest item since Wednesday matinees, but she provides the ethereal magic against which the earthy vulgarity and wit and sparkle of Joe Gideon's extravaganzas play. Cliff Gorman does the nightclub comic magnificently, manic in his showstopper on the stages of death, deadly accurate when he puts Gideon down: "I got insight into you, Gideon. You know what's underneath? The dreadful fear that you're *ordinary*!" Fosse/Gideon verifies that mock-snarled insight with his curtain scene, set to the tune of "Bye Bye, Love," here "Bye Bye, Life," the entire routine lovingly presided over by Ben Vereen, who starred in Fosse's *Pippin.*

It's like a reunion of the Fosse veterans, huffing and hoofing and beltin' out those tunes; it's a two-hour résumé of the career of the only man ever simultaneously to win an Oscar (*Cabaret*), two Tonys (*Pippin*) and an Emmy (for a Liza Minnelli special), all this in 1973; it's a fantasy about going too far and deciding, what the devil, why not?! You get your money's worth in dance, in script, and especially in Roy Scheider's surprising turn as Gideon. Surprising because this actor has impressed American audiences in *Jaws* and *The French Connection* and other "serious" films, and here he is not only uncomfortably similar to Fosse in looks, but scrappy and funny and graceful and rakish.

An immediate reference comes to mind: Fellini, both for *8½*, his own cinema autobiographical purge, and for that maybe-yes-maybe-no image of Death. More to the point is the experimentation and the exuberance that have typified the best of Federico Fellini's pictures. Freaks are standard items in those films, grotesques and uniques and loonies. In *All That Jazz* Fosse has surely borrowed a great deal of Fellini's way with a story, as with his tendency to slip back and forth across a hazy line separating the real from the imagined. Gideon/Fosse is the most monstrous freak of all in *All That Jazz,* carrying, if you will, a "Fellinieque" technique one giant step farther than Fellini ever did, even in those brutally self-taunting scenes in *8½*. Fellini often returned to the scenes of his own experience, reworked the material of his life, but retained a gravity in depicting himself that Fosse wholly abandons here. Fosse has created a gloriously beautiful musical and set it down inside a hideous evisceration of his excesses. He has spared us nothing—not his talent as movie-maker and choreographer and (with Robert Alan Aurthur) writer, nor his cold, far from enthusiastic appraisal of his majestically flawed character. Bob Fosse need have no fear that his creative juices are drying up, though only his cardiologist can tell, for sure, if he's heading for an early death.

So where does that leave Chauncey Gardiner? I saw the movies the same day, just before Christmas, in theatres across the street from Bloomingdale's. Maybe I've put more in these two films than the juxtaposition of them here warrants. But I wonder. Third Avenue was then, as it usually is, filled with Fosse clones tightly stretched into their booties and black pants and turtleneck sweaters, their ladies and lovers hopping along on heels, their gold chains glistening, their short-cropped hair and neat little beards framing their artificially tanned faces. (They look adorable.) I was waiting in line to get into *Being There,* having just come from *All That Jazz,* and a plain plump man in a neat grey suit walked by, carrying a sign that said "All Will Be Made Plain Soon," and handing out leaflets inviting people to sign up for something, a course of lectures, I believe, at some Church of the Everlasting Whatever, or whatever—I lost the leaflet. One of the Fosse clones said to his date, or wife, or whatever, a blonde dressed all in white, standing just in front of me: "Well, who knows? I think he was on Merv." The sign man smiled and whispered over his shoulder: "No, on cable." ❑

LR's film critic reviews also for WNAC-TV (CBS) and WHDH-AM in Boston; he hosts "The David Brudnoy Show," New England's leading radio talk program, on WHDH; and he writes a thrice-weekly newspaper column. He is also Deputy Sheriff of Middlesex County (Massachusetts).

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