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COMPLIMENTARY

Making The World Strange Again

Chris Furst and
Jeff Schwaner

John Vernon, whose essay on the dubious history of Napoleon's penis was published in the New York Times Book Review last July, will be reading at the Bookery February 7th. We visited him in Vestal to talk about his upcoming Harper's essay on the new historical fiction, as well as his latest novel Peter Doyle, which the San Francisco Chronicle called "a funhouse-mirror distortion of American dreams. American

eccentricities and American tragedies, offered with sly purpose and cracked wisdom." The book's "deliciously preposterous narrative device" is none other than the fabled phallus itself as it slips through the fingers of characters savory and unsavory, but Vernon incorporates great fictional portraits of Horace Greeley, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and the entire Western frontier into a novel that deals with a constant search for what's missing, and how our perception of what would make us complete affects our expectations and behavior.

In his Harper's essay, Vernon posits the incompleteness of history as one of the forces driving the historical fiction of the last decade. With the glacier of the Cold War period beginning to recede, novelists are in the vanguard of a new encounter with our past, breaking the ice between the contemporary reader and a reconstitution of the language, dreams, and sensory experience of individuals living under circumstances more foreign or strange to us than conventional history would have us believe. In the case of Napoleon's missing member, Vernon demonstrates in Peter Doyle that conventional history comes up short, relying on many half-truths

and legends to create a narrative that only appears to be whole.

JS: How is the essay on historical fiction going?

JV: I wrote this down the other day: "The idea is to be curious about what the world was like before it all started to be the same." I think I first became attracted to historical themes or historical fiction out of a desire to restore some strangeness to the world. The Russian Formalist critics in this century said art or literature makes the world strange again and frees us from banal and predictable ways of judging things. I started reading some of the French *Annales* historians, and I remember something that Fernand Braudel said in the preface to one of his books: He said if we were to go back to the 18th century and talk with Voltaire, we'd be able to have a conversation with him and we'd understand each other. But what would really be appalling to us would be the material differences between his circumstances and

ours. We'd be freezing, we'd notice all sorts of unfamiliar smells. Everything in the sensory world, everything related to material

Peter Doyle, especially the scene where Pete and Josie are sitting together by a tree, remembering the smell inside the tepees. In the beginning of the book, the first thing I was struck by was the sense of how dirty Manhattan was, a real sense of what the living conditions were like.

JV: It was the time when the first tenements were being built and waves of European immigrants were arriving. There were pigs on the streets of New York in the 1870s. There were piles of trash and rubble. The Brooklyn Bridge was started at that time; I can't remember what the tallest building was, but I think it was one of the churches on lower Broadway. It was a New York we wouldn't recognize today, but just barely beginning to become something we could relate to.

JS: But to go back to Voltaire, how do you as a writer research the material circumstances of his life?



Photograph: Pat Roberts

John Vernon

comfort, eating and defecating—all those things would be vastly different.

CF: You really conveyed that in

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The Labor Beat

The New Labor Press
Sam Pizzigati and
Fred J. Solowey, Editors
ILR Press, Cornell University
paper, \$16.95 /cloth, \$38.00

Al Davidoff

Only one form of written communication outside the mainstream commercial press regularly reaches 20 million Americans—the labor press. Virtually every national union has a paper or magazine that gets mailed to its members' homes each and every month. The National Education Association's Director of Publishing, Sam Pizzigati, and the (new) Teamster's Communications Coordinator, Fred Solowey (both former Ithaca activists), have edited a collection of twenty essays critiquing the labor press and offering inspiring visions for its future. While dozens of books have proclaimed the demise of the labor movement, this one, *The New Labor Press*, offers hope and some specific ideas for rebuilding. Pizzigati and Solowey make a

compelling and passionate argument that the labor press must play a leading role in helping the labor movement transform itself into a dynamic, fighting force for working people. "We harbor no romantic illusions about the power of the labor press. No publications alone, no matter how vital, can overcome the social and economic pressures currently squeezing labor. But we deeply believe that a reinvigorated labor press can make a significant contribution to labor renewal. We deeply believe that labor papers can help people feel their unions belong to them. We deeply believe that labor journalism can help union members recognize the necessity of unity—and respect the value of diversity in an increasingly multicultural work environment."

Two early essays describe how labor can aggressively improve mainstream newspaper and TV coverage, and lay the groundwork for Pizzigati and Solowey's emphasis on the importance of labor's improving and expanding its own internal publications. An article by

the New York Times' former labor reporter, William Serrin, chronicles the demise of the "labor beat" at virtually all major newspapers. Robert Kalaski, President of the International Labor Communications Association, writing on television's approach to working people, says, "If we were to judge the prevalence and importance of jobs in American society by what appears on television, nearly half of us would work in law enforcement." Kalaski points out that TV's attitude toward worker organizations is even less well-rounded: "Through the distorted eye of television, unions contribute little to society except strike turmoil."

Pizzigati and Solowey's collection provides useful ideas for how to create more relevant grassroots publications. Labor journalists candidly explore questions about coverage of women, new non-English-speaking minority workers, racism, and such tactical issues as the best uses of cartoons and photos. They also address the limits of

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The Colors of Jazz

Meet Me at Jim and Andy's
Gene Lees
Oxford, paper, \$8.95

Waiting for Dizzy
Gene Lees
Oxford, paper, \$10.95

Joel Ray

After reading a Gene Lees piece I nearly always want to listen to the music. His essay on Bill Evans in *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's* sent me to the used record stalls for an early Riverside LP, and for Evans' last concerts in Germany; thirty years apart, the two sessions were, to Lees, embodiments of the same searching spirit. His remarks on the fluent, imaginative tenor style of Benny Golson helped me to hear Golson much more clearly, and to appreciate the link between his playing and his genius as a jazz composer. The first two chapters in *Waiting for Dizzy*, highlighting the jazz of the 1920s, stimulated a birthday request that was recently satisfied with the vivid, swinging 1926-33 recordings

of violinist Joe Venuti and guitarist Eddie Lang. Lees' friendliness is that he wants you to listen to the music and hear it freshly, and free of the preconceptions accreted over generations of often narrow and contentious criticism.

In his foreword to *Waiting for Dizzy*, the writer Terry Teachout says,

Jazz, being an improvised music, takes shape at the crossroads of the improviser's personality and the circumstances under which he is improvising. An outsider... cannot tell you what it felt like to play with Duke that night—or ride the train with him the next morning. Far too little of (such inside knowledge) has gotten into the history books. Waiting for Dizzy is a welcome exception....

A lyricist, biographer, and historian, Lees is an engaging writer with a storyteller's sense of pacing and style. His essays open the door to the lives of relatively obscure and

see *Jazz*, page 10

Letters to the Editor

Vanishing Savings: Compelling Argument or Red Herring?

To the Editor:

Can we rely on the private sector to invest in the economic restructuring of the US? Will the profit motive direct investments to the right places, the right products, the right technologies? In short, will the private sector manage investment so that the future will bring an increasing standard of living for workers and growth that is sufficient to pay for massive, required public improvements? What can and should be the role of government policy in shaping this transition? These issues underlay the recent presidential campaign, and constitute the theme, I think, of Alfred E. Kahn's article, "Chronic Consumption," in the October *Bookpress*. His article invites comment.

If I read Professor Kahn's article correctly, his thesis is that restructuring our economy can be entrusted primarily to the private sector, so long as the government establishes an overall climate that is favorable to economic growth. In Professor Kahn's world of smooth transitions, the conversion "to peace...like the unemployment of some workers that would follow conclusion of a North American Free Trade Agreement...is nothing more than a mild intensification of the problem of stagnation" (italics mine). Complaints of competitive decline are, he asserts, "grossly exaggerated."

In such a world the role of public policy should be simply to create an environment congenial to investment and economic growth; the market will do the rest. Specifically, financial markets must be kept flush with savings so that interest rates may be kept low enough to encourage investment. And that, says Professor Kahn, is the catch. Our

household savings rate has been falling. The decline explains our present malaise and threatens the future. Thus the savings rate—specifically its intensification—assumes paramount importance in Professor Kahn's article and in his policy recommendations.

I think the economics profession has "grossly exaggerated" the role of savings in our recent overall failure to thrive; and, similarly, it has generally overrated the ability of private investors to steer us to the promised land—even with adequate savings. Can we, for example, cure the social ills that Professor Kahn lists in his article—increasing poverty, homelessness, and stagnating living standards—as well as a host of problems that go unmentioned—increasing lawlessness and declining communities—by simply manipulating a few policy levers, among them the savings rate? Or is the matter considerably more complex?

First, a brief case against the primacy of savings.

● Savings facilitate investment, they do not cause investment. In the current—as in any—recession, the momentary problem is an insufficient demand for the potential output of the economy. In this case, an attempt to revive investment by increasing savings is likely to be counterproductive. A reduction in consumption would withdraw consumer dollars from an already depressed economy and further weaken incentive to invest, and the economy might plunge even further.

● Even if households do manage to funnel increased financial resources into credit markets, any investment thereby facilitated will not necessarily be socially productive. Real estate developments and cushy offices will not lead to increased worker productivity and expanded living standards. Nor will expansions of plants in Singapore. What investors do with the money

matters.

● A low domestic savings rate does not constrain domestic investment. Financial markets are global; if investors have a burning desire to invest in the US, they may avail themselves of foreign savings.

● Economist Fred Block, in a recent article with Robert Heilbroner in *The American Prospect* (Spring, 1992), suggests that the reputed savings decline is a figment of statisticians' imagination. Block's evidence indicates that the first part of the "trickle-down" theory worked: income redistributed to the rich did create an enlarged pool of financial resources available for investment. But those resources simply didn't trickle down.

While in the long run I agree with Professor Kahn that we will have to increase worldwide savings to finance needed investment, I disagree that focusing on the savings rate per se is very useful now. The real issue is how to get the private sector—even if it is supplied with adequate credit—to make investment decisions that will promote the public interest.

Let's look at the record. Investment data and studies from the Council on Competitiveness at the Harvard Business School, both reported in a recent article by Bennett Harrison ("Where Private Investment Fails," *The American Prospect*, Fall 1992), are instructive.

● After rising sharply in the sixties, the trend in net real domestic private investment essentially flattened. This means that the investment rate is falling and that American workers have, at least in dollar terms, less and less capital to work with on a per-worker basis. Assuming that the data do not mask significant improvements in the quality of capital, this in turn means falling productivity, lagging wages, and, yes, lagging savings rates for households with stagnating real incomes. This trend started in the early seventies, before the alleged decline in the savings rate.

● In contrast with companies in Germany and Japan, America's private companies "chronically underinvest" in projects with a long-term payoff.

● According to economists Lawrence Summers and James Poterba, in recent years "investors here have been rejecting projects with expected inflation-adjusted payoff below 12 percent—even though the recent real cost of debt has averaged only about 2 percent."

● In order to maintain earnings in the short term, private companies forego investment in new technologies and products in favor of real estate and other acquisitions

In response to increased competitive pressure, American corporations systematically diminished their productive investment in the US; restructured the job market toward part-time, low-wage jobs not amenable to unionization; and engaged in a flurry of real estate developments and mergers and acquisitions. These activities may have saved the bottom line but they did so at the expense of the living standards of thousands upon thou-

sands of Americans.

What can be done? It is instructive to look at a period of successful restructuring—the post-World War II period (the same period that Professor Kahn discusses in his article). Two conditions seem to have been of crucial importance to successful restructuring then. First, business firms in the US operated in a relatively risk-free environment. Second, government played a large, active role that went well beyond conventional policies to maintain full employment. A kind of public-private partnership provided the context for increasing standards of living. These conditions evaporated in the early seventies with the advent of global markets and global competition. They have not been replaced by sensible institutions that will promote socially productive private investment behavior.

What did government do? The federal government subsidized veterans' education, thus providing a stimulus to higher education; it supported the market for US exports abroad through foreign aid; it provided a vast stimulus to residential housing construction; it financed the construction of the interstate highway system (which, in turn, greatly subsidized the domestic automobile industry). In addition, it used the Cold War as an excuse to lavish generous expenditures on the defense industry and to promote research and development.

For its part, the private sector operated in a low-risk environment. There was little or no competition from overseas producers and, for that matter, little price competition from domestic producers, as many of our major firms operated in only minimally competitive industries, such as automobiles, tractors, steel, and airlines. Markets and prices, including the foreign exchange rate, were generally predictable.

In the early seventies, the positive thrust of government activism faded; foreign competitors invaded American markets, causing fluctuating exchange rates and wildly varying interest rates, and inflation further threatened the predictability of the future. A high-risk environment for investment was substituted for a low-risk environment.

This analysis suggests policy conclusions that differ from Professor Kahn's. It does not, for example, suggest measures designed to decrease consumption in order to increase savings, except, perhaps, for the gasoline tax and other environmental taxes that have merit for other reasons. It accepts measures that he suggests to improve the overall climate for business investment, while reminding us more is needed.

We need, for example, a systematic way to manage trade; we need policies that encourage development in Central and Eastern Europe and less developed countries; we need to use the extraordinary purchasing power of governments at all levels to create domestic markets for new, environmentally sound products and technologies. In addition, we need to promote inquiry into institutional mechanisms that will encourage business investment

decisions that will be more responsive to the needs of workers, their communities, and the environment. The way present investment decisions are made simply will not do.

Ruth M. Mahr,

Visiting Professor in the City and Regional Planning Department, Cornell University

✦

Wilson and Talcottville

To the Editor,

I want to express appreciation for your lead article in the November issue on "Upstate, Revisited." First because it sent me back to Wilson's book, which I reread with increased pleasure. Second because it provided some fresh information on the characters who helped to shape his life in Talcottville.

That whole scene is very familiar to me because I was born and raised not far away. In the years of Wilson's residence in the Town of Leyden my father was town clerk. The town board meetings were held in our living room. Otis Munn, EW's cousin, was town supervisor and attended those meetings always. His wife Fern was a friend of my mother's. My cousin Ambrose Bailey lived across from Rosalind Baker Wilson in Talcottville. Back in the 1950s it was rumored that Ambrose, a strong conservative, erected the famous "Impeach Earl Warren" sign on EW's tree.

My second reading of the book impresses me how strongly EW felt kinship with those local characters, not only with Mary Pcolar and Huldah Loomis, who could be an occasional intellectual stimulus, but with the ordinary uneducated people, including his cousins. EW of course lived in a world of his own. His guests were mostly intellectuals from the literary world, whose intrusion into southern Lewis county was like a trip to the back woods. In a kind of preface to his book he wrote, "The following are selections from my diary-notebooks...There is a good deal here about myself, but I had become from my childhood associations and from my later settled life there, almost as much a part of the locality as the more deeply rooted residents...This little town is a point of permanence for me." His visit to Mary Pcolar's mother in her converted chicken-house had a touch of human tenderness in it. This was not the "cranky old man" or the blustering critic of the social system.

I am grateful that Michael Serino's article resurrected such old memories. If he should ever come north again I will gladly show him where the Flat Rock on the Sugar River is. I regret that he did not stop to visit Rosalind. The local people like her very much. My cousin said to me, "She has a heart of gold." Incidentally I gave her Serino's article.

Monsignor Joseph G. Bailey
Rossie, New York

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the BOOKPRESS

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Editorial Staff: Jack Goldman, Joel Ray

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Reaping the Whirlwind

An End To Hunger? The Social Origins of Food Strategies

A Report prepared for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and for the South Commission based on UNRISD research on food systems and society
Solon L. Barraclough
Zed Books Ltd. 284 pp, \$19.95

Porus Olpadwala

I

Any effort to understand the world food situation must start with an appraisal of the physical capacity of the earth to nourish its inhabitants. Is there, and can there be, enough food for all? In *An End to Hunger?* Solon Barraclough, whose impressive credentials include those of an agriculturalist, activist, international civil servant, and scholar, makes it very clear that this is no longer an issue. There is no physical shortage of food today. Barraclough quotes several studies, including those of such establishment sources as the World Bank, to show that "the world has ample food." Indeed, and surprising as it may sound to laypeople, in the last twenty years the overall world food dilemma has had a component that was related to "persistent" and "endemic" food surpluses.

But that is not all. For an overwhelmingly large proportion of the sufferers, the surpluses actually exist right in their own vicinity. The largest absolute numbers of severely malnourished people are on the Indian subcontinent, in India and Bangladesh. Both countries have made dramatic advances in food production in the last twenty years; India particularly has been self-sufficient in food grains since the mid-70s, holds food reserve stocks of 20 - 30 million tons, and is a net cereal exporter. And yet these same two countries account for the lion's share of the 40,000 children of one year of age or less that UNICEF estimates die daily on the planet from causes that are entirely and only hunger related.

Even if there is enough now, what of the future? Will the growth of human populations eventually outstrip the present adequate food supply? Neo-Malthusians stress that unless the problem of population is dealt with "there is not much use in doing anything else . . . [because it will be] cancelled out by growing hordes of people." Barraclough contends, on the contrary, that "world food supplies could be increased to meet the needs of practically any conceivable growth in population." This of course assumes that appropriate structural changes can be made in the industrialized countries as well as in the poorer nations. At the moment, we in the industrialized world put an immeasurably greater strain on resources — including food resource — than do the developing nations. *The State of the World, 1991* charges that the "world's one billion meat eaters, car drivers, and throw-away consumers are responsible for the lion's share of the damage humans have caused to common global resources."

Barraclough concedes that

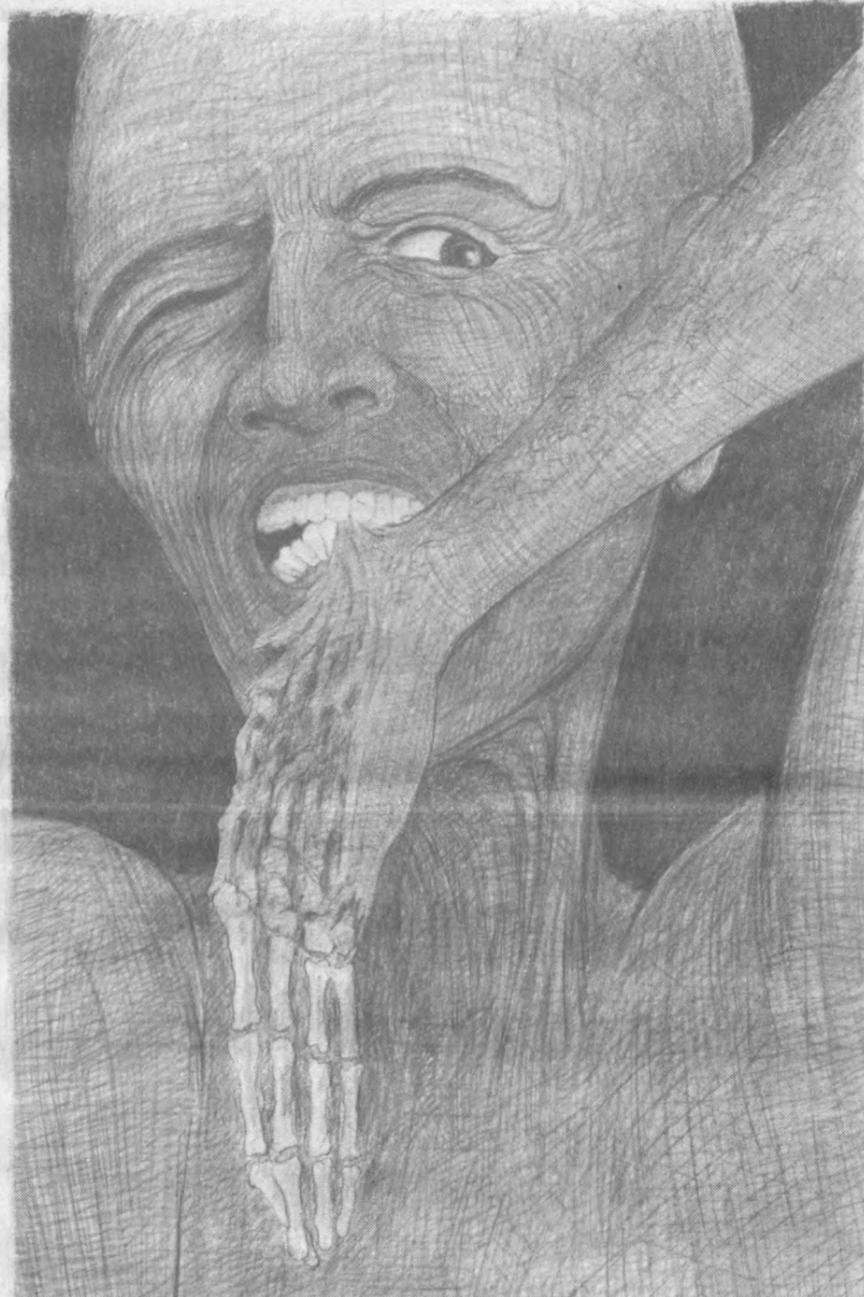
population increases hamper the situation nevertheless, and need to be countered. The best way is through "expanding human capabilities and raising the quality of life" through deep and genuine social reforms, in addition to the indubitably needed family planning programs. "A population programme without popular-based development is like trying to mop up the floor with the water turned on." But by making it clear that the solution to the problem of hunger does

Organization (FAO) in Latin America in the 1960s and early 1970s, Barraclough became renowned as an authority on land tenure and agrarian reform. He wrote at length, lectured, and taught in many Third and First World universities. His scholarship led him to the directorship, in 1977, of the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Even as an international civil servant and researcher, Barraclough never forgot his grassroots activism, for which he paid the

ensures the food insecurity of billions of people. Investments are diverted to non-priority and luxury needs, in the countryside and in the cities. Agricultural production is shunted to cash and export crops, and food crops, when grown, are given over to animal feed and other non-human consumption. Business and public benefits are cornered and co-opted by the privileged classes. The rural poor are physically and psychologically brutalized, and if they choose to resist, even by "peaceful democratic means, they are likely to be forcibly repressed with loss of liberty, livelihood and sometimes life . . . [by] devastating reprisals from landlords, employers and the police."

The most important way to reduce hunger and food insecurity is to enlarge the numbers of people who are in control of their own economic destiny. This requires raising the levels of genuine participation in society, particularly among the least privileged. The main barriers to this are found in social structure rather than in faulty policy. Eliminating or reducing structural roadblocks almost always involves some measure of agrarian reform and changes in land tenure, although it may not be limited to that. Where land has been distributed more equitably, improvements have followed in food security and general physical well-being. If the changes have been accompanied by some sort of transition to collectivized or communal agricultural production, the

Illustration: Fernando Llosa



not have to wait upon driving down rates of population growth, Barraclough forces us to grapple with the much more contentious social dimensions of the issue.

Barraclough is a quintessential practitioner-scholar. A country youth from New Hampshire (he still owns farmland there), he served with the US Occupation Forces in Japan after World War II, an experience that he credits with sparking his interest in development issues. After an economics doctorate from Harvard aided by the GI Bill, he began professional life doing field work with sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta. There he first became acquainted with extreme social and economic inequities, and the brutal power of landed interests, that later were to form one of the focal interests of his life and work. As a US agricultural officer in the Middle East, and then as a senior official with the UN Food and Agriculture

all too common price. His family was forced to depart Chile in danger after the 1973 military coup, and later, at the start of the Reagan years, he was eased out of the UNRISD directorship by pressure from the Reagan administration because of his assistance to revolutionary Nicaragua.

II

Although he never states it quite so directly, Barraclough argues that the problem of world hunger has two roots. One is the failure of public policy; the other, the destructive effect of regressive social structures. These twin shortcomings exist in both the Third World and in the industrialized countries, and they extend beyond agriculture and rural areas to all parts of national economies, including the urban-industrial sector and international trade.

This deadly mixture of failed policies and biased social structure

results have been even better and longer lasting. On the other hand, land reform by itself is no panacea, or guarantor of improved food security. Societies are very complicated. So is history. It is imprudent to try to generalize too much about these issues. "Each situation" says Barraclough, "is special."

If social factors are the principal cause of world hunger, what are they and how do they operate? If conspiracy is rejected as an explanation, then the task becomes how to identify and wrestle into some order and priority the numerous other forces and decisions that combine to create this situation. This is the point at which many other treatments begin to unravel, but Barraclough does not stumble.

The problem may be caused by faulty economic and social policies, including sheer neglect. This certainly has been the case in the past. For instance, less developed countries often have hurt food produc-

tion by giving preference to investment in industry over that in agriculture. Or they have kept prices of basic agricultural commodities artificially low to favor their more concentrated and politically volatile city populations.

Barraclough's approach to food and development policy is informed, practical, sober, and pithy. It is also refreshingly open-minded and honest. Aspects of political economy permeate the discussion. For example, how would one evaluate policies to create a multimillion-dollar investment project in Senegal and Mali for dams and associated infrastructure which "turned out to be uneconomic...[but from which] many foreign contractors and consultants reaped handsome profits?" Or how does the West's insistence on free trade and open markets jibe with its own long history of subsidy and protection of agriculture? What are the consequences for developing countries of the strangling presence of oligopoly in agricultural commodity trade, where "(t)rans-national corporations controlled two-thirds of world trade... in the early 1980s," or of the "unstable world monetary system," which keeps the Third World at a handicap no matter how good their foreign exchange technicians?

If improper policy were all that was at fault, the tragedy would be neither so large nor so persistent. Sooner or later most policymakers would be redeemed into the correct way of seeing and doing things. Unfortunately, policies are dependent upon, and subject to, the workings of deeper structural forces, substantially related to skewed asset and income distributions. For example, more than 70 percent of India's population lives in the countryside, and half of it is landless. Needless to say, these lives are extremely tenuous. Further, even many of the people who own land are not much better off because it is not adequate in size and quality. Barraclough refers to a survey of 50,000 households in Eastern India that found that "nearly half the families in West Bengal and one-third in Orissa did not produce enough food to feed their families for even one month in the year."

In Latin America, the "bi-modal" distribution divides rural areas into "two clearly distinct strata in respect to the size of farms, their market orientation, and the socio-political position of the cultivators," with "essentially exploitative" links attaching them to each other. Large cultivators, domestic and foreign, indulge in the "rapacious exploitation of soil, water and forest resources for short-term profits" that end up further marginalizing peasants. Where land is more equitably held, the food situation is shown to be markedly better. Unfortunately, with trends moving clearly towards privatization and concentration in landholdings, the prospects for improvement based upon structural adjustment can only be viewed as grim.

Those who do not own land, or enough of it, depend upon others to provide work. These jobs may be on

see *Hunger*, page 4

Off Campus**At The Bookery**

The Bookery Winter/Spring lecture series continues Sundays at 4 p.m. in the new lecture space in Bookery II.

February 7

**John Vernon**

will read from his third novel *Peter Doyle* and give a talk on the new style of historical fiction. Vernon is a professor of English at Binghamton University.

February 21

**Pietro Pucci**

professor of classics at Cornell University, will give a lecture on how modern critical thought envisions and reacts to Sophocles' *Oedipus*. His recently published book is entitled *Oedipus and the Fabrication of the Father*.

March 14

**Gail Holst-Warhaft**

will talk on why Greek women's laments were banned in antiquity and what danger they posed to the democratic state. Her just-published book is *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. Holst-Warhaft is a lecturer in classics and comparative literature at Cornell.

April 4

**Sandra Bem**

professor of psychology and women's studies at Cornell, will talk about our culture's assumptions concerning sex and gender and how they shape society, which is also the subject of Bem's new book, entitled *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*.

May 2

**Debra Tall**

will read from and talk about her just-published book entitled *From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place*. Tall is a poet and non-fiction writer and a professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.

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Hunger

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farms, or in off-farm activities located in the country, or in cities. Here too the future is foreboding. Agricultural modernization tends to displace hired labor on farms, either through mechanization or through its replacement by family members. Where jobs do exist, real wages are often stagnant or falling. Likewise, the record of rural off-farm employment in the Third World has not been very encouraging. Migration to towns and cities is a massively chosen option, but it too falls far short of need. International migration—a key if severely underacknowledged factor in the past development of the industrialized countries—is effectively absent.

A few countries have managed to break their structural constraints through agrarian reform. This is one of Barraclough's professional specializations, and chapter 4 ("The Role of Agrarian Reform") is an excellent survey of land reform in approximately three dozen countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Not all were equally successful. Indeed, Barraclough singles out only six as being particularly effective in increasing the food security of the rural poor (China, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Cuba and Nicaragua). The Mexican and Bolivian reforms were effective "for a few decades" only, some of the others for even shorter periods. Some movements changed the distribution of land only (Mexico, Bolivia), while others tried also to change property relations (mainly China and Cuba). The relative success of all depended upon the seriousness with which they were pursued, and the "national and global processes of which [they were] only a small part." Barraclough also records the important role of foreign intervention in the "global processes," particularly that of the United States in Latin America.

Barraclough spares no one in this searching analysis of policy and structure. "Soft" do-gooders of whatever ideological variant are forced to confront the harsh and disciplining presence of economic laws, including the unavoidable necessity for economic growth. Establishment economists are upbraided and upended repeatedly in a series of crisp rebuttals of their favorite shibboleths (e.g., the popular doctrine of "getting prices right," and the various development "dilemmas"). Uncritical proselytizers of the developmental methods of the industrialized countries are reminded at every turn of their unique and unreplicable advantages compared to the Third World. More radical analysts are brought to earth by practical accounts of miserable failures in attempts at food security even after revolutionary struggle and structural change. The short-term mentality, the greed and corruption of the private sector, are also exposed. So are the ineptitude, sluggishness, and corruption of the public sector. National and international bureaucracies are critiqued. Nothing is sacrosanct.

III

Why cannot more be done to stem hunger on a purely humanitar-

ian basis, even as we sort out its complex roots? We know the places where people are at risk. The food exists, and is often available nearby. We have the means to convey it. What stymies the effort to reduce drastically the number of hungry people worldwide?

Barraclough offers political and techno-economic reasons. Much of the purpose of food aid has been and continues to be "strictly political." This fact is now so well established that it brooks no argument, even from the aid-givers. Probably the most recent example is a speech given at the UN last September by President Bush in which he categorized his own Agency for International Development as "a weapon in the Cold War."

On the economic side, the food aid process is as much driven by "supply" (the endemic surpluses that the book notes) as by demand. Since it serves the donor at least as much as the recipient, both the composition and the timing of the assistance are far from ideal. The composition is determined substantially by the donor's agricultural needs. Barraclough recalls instructions to him as a US AID official in 1958: "We should do everything possible to promote agricultural exports and to avoid encouraging local production that would directly compete with them." These goals are well documented and apparently were achieved. AID's newsletter, *Highlights*, reports in its Spring 1992 issue that of the 50 largest importers of US farm goods, 43 are nations that once received food aid from the United States. As for the timing of food aid, Barraclough maintains that it is actually "counter cyclical" because it decreases sharply in periods of general scarcity and high world prices, when donor countries choose to sell the food instead. "This means that food aid... tends to be least available when food is dearest and aid most needed."

The reasons that are given most often by donor countries for not increasing assistance to match need are naturally technocratic, and tend to put the onus on the recipients. Often the food does not reach the intended beneficiaries because it is appropriated by more privileged elements, sometimes for their own use, sometimes for profit. When it does get through, the technical aspects of distribution can be mishandled, resulting in depressed domestic prices and reduced production. (Barraclough characteristically notes that these effects are "less a problem of aid... than of world food surpluses being dumped abroad.") Food aid is also used by recipients "primarily to delay or avoid making necessary domestic reforms."

IV

These concerns about food aid are perfectly valid from a technical point of view. But they also serve to underscore the structural constraints that prevent even the best-intentioned policymakers from achieving greater success. It seems that emergency and temporary relief measures are often derailed by many of the same forces that create

see *Hunger*, page 14

Fabre with a Camera

VELVET MITES AND SILKEN WEBS: THE WONDERFUL DETAILS OF NATURE IN PHOTOGRAPHS AND ESSAYS

Scott Camazine
John Wiley & Sons, \$24.95
178 pages

Howard C. Howland

Henri Fabre, the famous entomologist, was 55 when he came to work on his *harmas* at the edge of the village of Serignan. There he studied insects. His best instruments, he used to say, were "time and patience." With these he produced the *Souvenirs Entomologiques*, many of the best of which have been published in English in Edwin Way Teal's classic, *The Insect World of J. Henri Fabre*.

Fabre's essays are paragons of lucidity—descriptions of animal behavior combined with autobiographical information and occasional philosophical comments. Now, building on the plan of those short essays, and armed with a camera, Scott Camazine has further documented the natural history of our everyday world. And he has produced a remarkable book, one of the most exciting on natural history that has appeared in a long time. Camazine is both a superb photographer and a charming essayist. He also happens to be a practicing physician and a research biologist, and thus he brings diverse skills to his observations of nature.

Camazine has had an unusual career. He majored in biology as an undergraduate at Harvard and then went on to study medicine at the Harvard Medical School. While in that program, he spent a part of his medical internship with the Zuni in New Mexico, writing a project report on folk medicine.

After graduation from medical school, he spent a postdoctoral year with John Hildebrand at Harvard studying development in the tobacco hornworm, *Manduca*. He then came to Cornell to study with Thomas Eisner, working on the chemical defenses of plants and insects. Eisner reinforced his enthusiasm for natural history and taught him the value of photography in the study of nature. However, Camazine's real interests lay with social insects, and in particular with bees.

From boyhood on he had been interested in bees, and shortly after coming to Ithaca he set up an observation beehive in his home on Snyder Hill Road. After leaving Eisner's laboratory, he worked for a number of years with Roger Morse in the Department of Entomology at Cornell, traveling to Brazil to study killer bees and to Korea to lecture on apiculture. During most of this time he also practiced emergency medi-

cine at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira. Recently he took up his graduate education again, working with Thomas Seeley in Neurobiology and Behavior on the social organization of bees.

In 1987, Camazine wrote up a

from winter through spring, summer, fall and back to winter again. The essays are so diverse that it is difficult to speak of a "typical" one, but a good example might be the one on the garden spider's orb web. The photograph shows the spider, *Ariope*

does all the essays, with a set of references and suggestions for further reading.

Perhaps because of his interest in insect societies, Camazine is fascinated with all forms of self-organizing systems. In another essay, he

its structure does not promote crystallization. These tiny droplets pass near our snow crystal and evaporate. The frozen crystal robs them of their water and grows at their expense, expanding its arms in beautiful, six-sided symmetry. The snow crystal is now at the height of the cloud, in the peak of the updraft. The temperature here hovers around a frigid -20 degrees C.

Camazine's essays have a wider range than those of Fabre. About a third of them are on spiders, mites, and insects, another ten are on flowering plants and fungi, and the rest, except two on snowflakes and icicles, are on vertebrates.

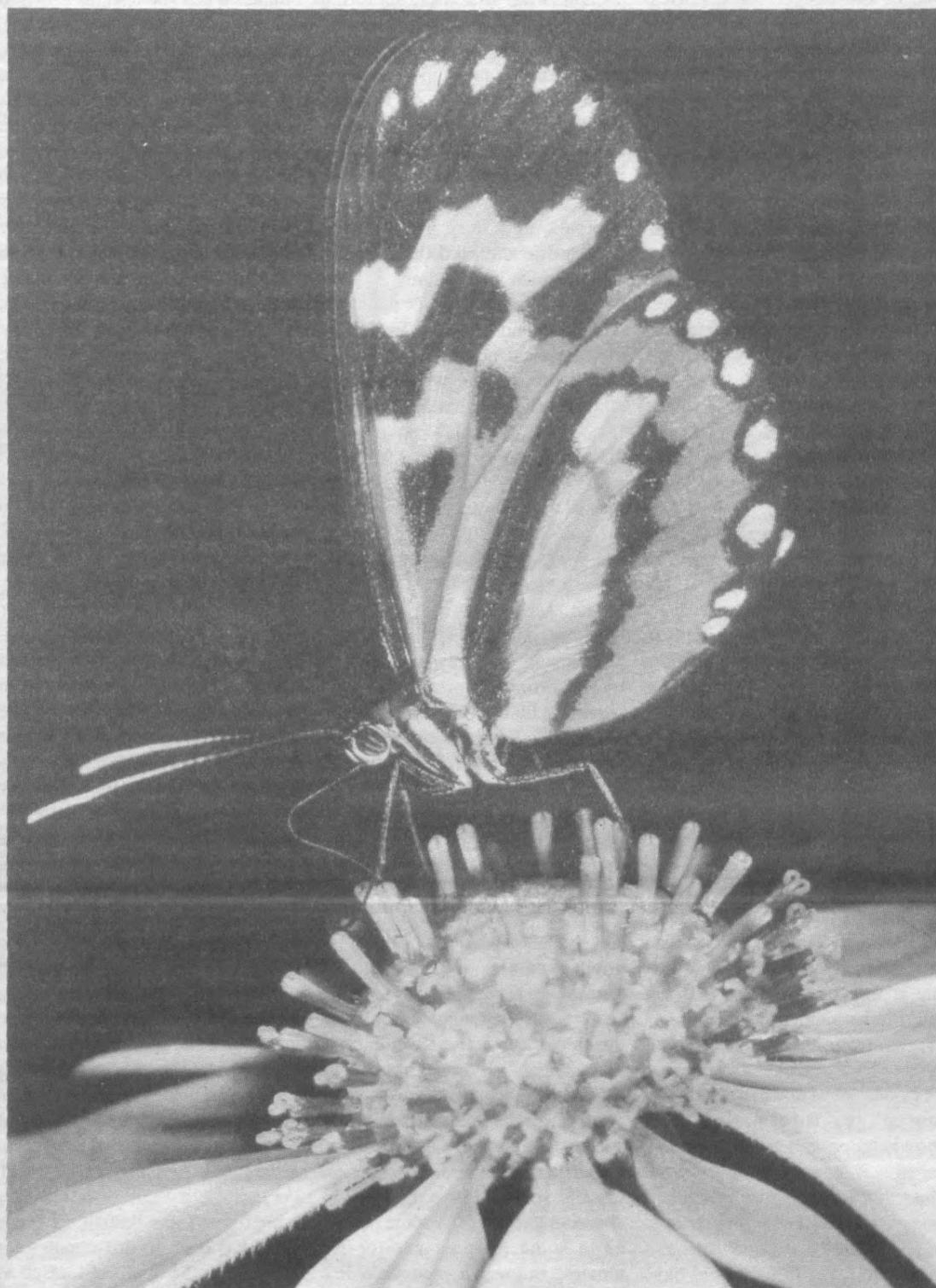
His penultimate essay on the human race, illustrated with a photograph of prematurely born twins, is a biologist's appeal for a sane custodianship of the earth. He writes, "Never before has a species held so much power over all others and over the future of the planet.... We can act as the guardians of this planet, or its pillagers. The choice is ours."

In several places Camazine's medical training shows through when he discusses fleas and the plague, or the opium poppy and the medications based on it. But mostly we hear the voice of a naturalist and a teacher, a person of unbounded curiosity with a strong desire to convey the mysteriousness and the beauty of nature. In this he is greatly assisted by the camera. With but two or three exceptions, the pictures are spectacular and technically exquisite, and excellent complements to the essays. His last essay contains advice for the naturalist on close-up photography.

A few weeks after reading Camazine's book I encountered a very large spider in a mangrove by the side of a Florida lake. Noticing that the wind was buffeting its web, I wondered what the spider would do if a small inanimate object was blown into it. It was the sort of experiment that both Fabre and Camazine urged their readers to perform. So I found a small piece of a pine needle and flicked it into the base of the web. Immediately the spider ran to the offending object and after a few deft manipulations pushed it out of the web and repaired the tear it had made. Watching that spider carefully remove the needle gave me an excitement that I had not experienced for many years, and reawakened the realization that I, too, could become a naturalist.

Scott Camazine has written an inspiring, beautiful book that would make a wonderful gift for children and adults alike.

Howard C. Howland is a professor in Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell University.



Photograph: Scott Camazine

From *Velvet Mites and Silken Webs*

set of experiments or "outdoor explorations" entitled "The Naturalist's Year," which was published by John Wiley & Sons. This book contained a number of Camazine's black-and-white photographs (or rather his color photographs printed in black-and-white, as he always employs color slide film).

Camazine's latest book is a collection of 41 short essays written around a set of his spectacular color photographs of plants and animals. They follow a rough seasonal theme

aurantia, in the center of its web with the "stabilimentum," a zigzag flag of silk, below it. Camazine outlines the building of the web, but cautions that his description "is a paltry substitute for your own observations." He describes the food-catching behavior of the spider and then discusses three theories of the function of the stabilimentum: a warning sign for birds, a variant which provides camouflage for woodland spiders, and a possible lure for insects. He concludes, as he

describes the birth of snowflakes:

Suddenly, the water turns to ice. A snow crystal is born. Far above, at an altitude of 20,000 feet, it swirls and dances about in the cloud, no longer an amorphous blob of water. Now the nascent crystal encounters other super-cooled water droplets, themselves unable to freeze for lack of their own special dust speck to act as a freezing nucleus. They also formed by condensing around a foreign particle, but something about

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Vernon

continued from page 1

JV: The material conditions of everyday life have become of much more interest in recent years to historians, pursuing what is called the new social history. This kind of history focuses on previously invisible people—women, slaves, indigenous peoples, and so forth. Also the history of technology, previously a relatively minor field, has occupied historians in recent years.

In my research I try to look at old letters, diaries, journals, newspapers, things like that, because I think one of the windows into the past is to reconstitute what the language of, say, Americans in the latter half of the 19th century was like. In *Peter Doyle*, one of my chief sources—not just for Walt Whitman, but for the American language in general—was a series of books put together by a friend of Whitman named Horace Traubel, who was a socialist and poet. He visited Whitman practically every day for the last five or six years of his life. Apparently he had a photographic memory (he didn't have tape recorders), which enabled him to write a series of books called *With Walt Whitman in Camden*—I think it goes to six volumes of unedited conversations with Whitman, who was an amazingly colorful speaker. I'm convinced that just as there are so many "facts" about history that have absolutely dropped out of discourse, so there are idioms, and phrases, and words in the language that are not even in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Dictionary of American Slang*. In fact, I found some of this language in Traubel's book. It really gives the flavor, the almost bodily, physical flavor of people living a hundred years ago. I'm convinced that the American language in the 1870s was both more vulgar and more elevated than now. Whitman could be very oratorical, but he was extremely down-to-earth at the same time. All this becomes a kind of window into the bodily existence of that period. For example, I'm not sure why, but "glue-pots" was an idiom used to describe a preacher or a parson in the 1870s—a phrase like that allows you to reimagine some of the past.

In writing *Peter Doyle*, I visited local historical societies here and in Colorado to find out about conditions, to look at how people

wrote their private thoughts, letters, and journals, because I think that's about as close as you can come to a record of spoken language. Old issues of newspapers, Greeley's *Colorado Tribune*, the *New York Tribune*, are a wonderful source for that sort of thing—everything from the advertisements, to the language of journalism, to the so-called human-interest stories. Actually, you can get lost in that kind of stuff. One of the dangers of historical fiction is mucking around in the material so much that you lose sight of the story you have to tell. It's related to the danger of wearing your historical research on your sleeve. I'm trying to write a historical fiction that's different from what historical novelists of the forties and fifties, say, wrote. Or even quite different from the James Michener kind of historical fiction, which is just large chunks of largely undigested information. One of the tricks of historical fiction is to try to convey essential information to the reader without his being aware of what's happening. Michener doesn't even bother to disguise it. People enjoy that, I suppose. He certainly has an audience.

CF: So it's a kind of subversive history you're doing, bringing in all these people who were at the margins.

JV: Right. I don't mean to imply in my essay that I don't respect historians, or I don't respect the notion of searching for historical truth. Official versions of history become like public myths or, as the critics say, "master narratives" or "public narratives." You know, the notion of a "new world order" "manifest destiny," the Enlightenment. These names take the form of large generalizations, but they leave out so much. The danger of a lot of historical writing is that it freezes the sense of what could have happened because it's written from the perspective of looking back and already knowing. As wonderful as much of that is as a source of information and knowledge, it can be misleading, because it leaves out entirely the sense that when history is actually being suffered by living human beings it can take many different paths—so many things could have happened. The novelist should be interested in living people who suffer their private dreams in the midst of historical forces—that sense of the private dream of history, rather than the public myth, is what I want

to get at. Some novelists I know go even further than I do playing with historical facts in the effort to give the reader a sense of what it was like to live, say, in 1860 in England or in America. Writers like Paul West, Jeanette Winterson, or William Vollmann don't shy away from giving an almost visionary sense of, to use an example from Vollmann, what it may have been like for a shaman in 17th-century Canada to encounter the first white settlers.

With the end of the Cold War, we're beginning to sense a kind of thaw, a kind of breakup of our own contemporary sense of history. We're beginning to see that history is not just one solid truth but many truths, competing for the sense of what is real. It is this multi-layered approach to history that is being reflected in the kind of historical fiction which interests me.

We tend to forget that *War and Peace* and *A Tale of Two Cities* are historical novels, written at a time when people weren't much concerned about categories like "historical fiction." When the historical novel split off from mainstream and literary fiction in this century, becoming another kind of genre fiction, like sci fi or crime fiction, it hardened into something monological, so-called "realistic" novels. Good fiction writers today who turn to history are doing so in a different spirit. They're surely not writing historical romances or even realistic historical dramas like MacKinlay Kantor's *Andersonville*—a powerful book, but essentially reflective of a World War II and Cold War mentality. The new historical fiction is more ambiguous, fantastic, visionary, and multiple.

JS: What are some examples of this approach?

JV: Don DeLillo's *Libra* is a good example. His portrait of Oswald, and especially of Oswald's mother, is quite remarkable. That's the kind of subjective fix on history that I mean. It's an imaginative construction, but not a reconstruction—it's really a construction of something that can't ultimately be known in a scientific way. I suppose it's the sort of thing that can be abused in the hands of some people, as in some of the made-for-TV movies. But with a great writer like DeLillo, it works.

JS: DeLillo is still concentrating on a central, historical figure, whether it's the murdered or the murderer. Of course, Oswald already is an icon, but he's working in a very intense

way on a few characters, as opposed to William Vollmann's spreadsheet of himself and everybody who lived before him.

JV: Vollmann has the almost early modernist ambition of writing books that are going to be monumental, that if you don't read them, you at least have to go around them. I kind of admire that. In that respect, Vollmann is a curious combination of the modern and the post-modern, I think. When you read his stuff you really see the influence of Pynchon, sometimes I think almost too much. A lot of it is in the language—a certain kind of flip, dippy-doo quality in the language. It can be quite funny and quite musical and colloquial. By inserting himself into the story, or inserting a narrator called "William the Blind," and these wonderful playful things in which historical figures seem to be walking through a landscape of the present, or vice-versa, people from the present walking through the past, Vollmann is signaling that what he's doing is fiction, and he knows that readers today are sophisticated enough to respond to the kind of self-conscious illusion he creates.

JS: In the draft of your essay on historical fiction, you write that the Vietnam War is a turning point in the way these writers view history.

JV: In one sense, the Vietnam War was a very American phenomenon. I really do think that it changed our view of large public events. I went through that whole period in the '60s and '70s, demonstrating against the war, and writing about it. For my generation, Vietnam and the Kennedy assassination were the defining events. People who were opposed to that war were opposed to a Cold War mentality, but not just here, all over the world. What we've seen in the last four or five years, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union and the reuniting of Germany, was all in germination then. It was all kind of churning and beginning in the '60s and '70s.

This seems to have led to an explosion of speculative historical fiction by writers of different generations from all over the world. For example, a couple of the novelists I mentioned are British. I mean West has been in this country for thirty years; he thinks of himself as American, but he's a British writer, as is Jeanette Winterson. I think of people like Umberto Eco, or José Saramago, do you know his *Baltasar and Blimunda*? It's a terrific novel. **CF:** Have you read *I, the Supreme*

by Roa Bastos? It's a novel about a 19th-century dictator of Paraguay, Dr. Francia. There are all these multiple voices in the narrative. The "editor" of the dictator's papers comes in, the secretary's voice interrupts, half-burned documents show up, proclamations, false proclamations: all of this interweaved, breaking off and coming back together.

JV: There are a lot of South American writers who write in this way, their countries being relatively young and involved in so much shifting and changing history where there aren't any certainties. Garcia Marquez's work or Vargas Llosa, whose *War of the End of the World* is a terrific book. Think of the Eastern European writers, too. They're people who have been subjected to official versions of history, trying to break those down.

CF: There's a feeling in a lot of these books that, after the minimalists, imagination is becoming more expansive.

JV: There's much more of a desire to be extravagant.

CF: Paul West speaks about the jazz of consciousness in talking about Virginia Woolf. But there's almost a kind of jazzlike, improvisational feel to some of these works.

JV: I agree. What makes it exciting is this imaginative extravagance, even fantasy, combined with the historical. Yet, in some ways, that kind of combination is not new. Those tensions have been in the novel right from the beginning: the sense of history on the one hand, and what used to be called romance on the other. I think a lot of what novelists are doing today is finding a new way to walk that old borderline.

JS: In the draft of your essay you mention *The Scarlet Letter*. It's an interesting case, because, unlike some of the other books you brought up, it's not about war or some cataclysmic moment in history; it deals with societal pressures related to a particular time and environment.

JV: It's also dealing with a kind of spiritual history. What I remember of Hawthorne was that he was drawn to the time, which would be 100-150 years before he was writing, when demons and witches actually did seem to inhabit the physical landscape in which his ancestors lived. He was certainly drawn to wondering whether that was actual or a sort of collective fantasy. I'm thinking not just of *The Scarlet Letter* see *Vernon*, page 12

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"... the practice of cultural retrieval—tempered with a sense of its instability, its contingency, its constructedness—has sponsored a remarkable time of black creativity. The most obvious example is the work of black British film collectives, which can be seen to deepen and expand the insights of a (Stuart) Hall or a (Homi) Bhabha—though the relation is not a mirroring, but a productive dialogue... filmmakers such as Sankofa's Isaac Julien and Black Audio's John Akomfrah—who directed the acclaimed feature film *Who Needs a Heart?*, based on the life of Michael X—are themselves cultural theorists of a sophistication with no counterpart in the American filmmaking community."

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John Vernon's Work-in-Progress

An Excerpt from "Prester John's Letter"

The narrator and protagonist of Prester John's Letter John Vernon's forthcoming novel, *Peto Marcellus*, is a dark-skinned founding raised by the monks and nuns of the double priory where he was abandoned as an infant, somewhere in southern England. In this scene, Peto, 17, has been invited to a feast at the palace of the local bishop, Nicholas Beaumont. Picture a great hall with torches burning on the walls, musicians on a balcony, tapestries hanging down, and noble men and women milling around in fancy clothes. The year is 1426.

We walked to the table, where Bishop Nicholas seated me on his right, an honor so singular I almost fell over, until I reminded myself that pride is only greed on stilts, which restored my balance. Then a dove flew into my breast, because he'd placed me across from that same young woman who'd been casting sheep's eyes at me from across the hall. The bishop introduced her as Elizabeth Wells. The lady beside her was her mother, but I missed the name, being so occupied with composing my eyes, which dropped to the table, then rose to the face of Elizabeth Wells, then dropped again, et cetera endlessly, like bouncing beads torn from a necklace. It shook me that every time I looked up, her gaze calmly skewered me, who squinted my own away, while her smile curled into one of her cheeks sweetly but with a mocking crink, her eyebrows arched, and her whole long face flexed like a sword. Note: the distance between her delicate nose and her upper lip was longer than my thumb. I mention mincing facts like this only to demonstrate the heightened rigor of my sense impressions even while my mind swam around in a laram. So as not to fly off, I forced myself to examine the contents of the table, at which more than thirty people were seated. On either end were two huge pies nearly as wide as the span of my arms, while occupying the middle on a platform was a lawn of green grass I assumed was artificial. But the bishop told me it was real. I expressed amazement, finding it of the greatest interest now, along with everything else under my gaze, which I didn't dare elevate, and I jumped up to reach immoderately across several gentlemen and touch that real grass, begging their pardon.

Scattered on the grass were pretty birds' feathers and green branches to which were tied violets, roses, and other flowers. A large fence stood in their midst made to

look like a fortress with a tower, but it was really a cage with a live pig and chicken shut up inside. The chicken's feet and beak had been gilded, and the pig's tusks silvered. Banners on the tower displayed the bishop's arms. Bishop Beaumont then nodded his head, the music stopped, and two servants stepped forward to cut into both of those pies, freeing clouds of steam and a smell so delicious I thought I might

a feast on me if they wanted to. There were no trenchers at this meal, but everyone was served on silver plates, and before we began the servants brought bowls of rose water for the guests to wash their hands. Each pie contained a whole roe-deer, a gosling, three capons, six chickens, ten pigeons, one young rabbit, a minced loin of veal, and a sturgeon, all cut into gubbings and floating in fat with twenty-four hard

cream, wheat and eggs. No one commented on the food, so I played mum too. Instead, the gentleman beside me discussed with the mother of Elizabeth Wells such important issues as whether a lofty soul in an uncomely body was better than a beautiful face with low and common manners, a question I didn't want to address myself, being doubtful of my own manners in that company.

cakes, dates, glazed onions, poached snails, leeks, beets, celery, cooked sprouts, coriander, and several kinds of nuts, all diluted with fresh eggs. The cygnets were stuffed more simply, though, with raisins, honey, dried bread, wine and fresh laurel, whose flavor had colored the meat and bones, for one eats these small birds bones and all.

I felt as though I'd been swimming in mead. Despite the care with which I'd eaten, by this time I'd managed to slobber my doublet with greases and sauces, but since everyone else had done the same it didn't bother me. In fact, quagmires of wine, sauce and drippings had formed on the table, along with little scrapple pies and puddings, and bones at our elbows and on the floor, with the requisite dogs crunching them in their teeth, and Bishop Nicholas tipping to one side to claw at their backs, just as Brother Henry had warned me not to. Elizabeth Wells put a finger in her mouth; one of her girlish cheeks seemed to twitch. I've never felt such *carosity* in my life, that is, the sheer fact of bodies with their gullets and stomachs devouring other bodies without. If only the hog rubbers in

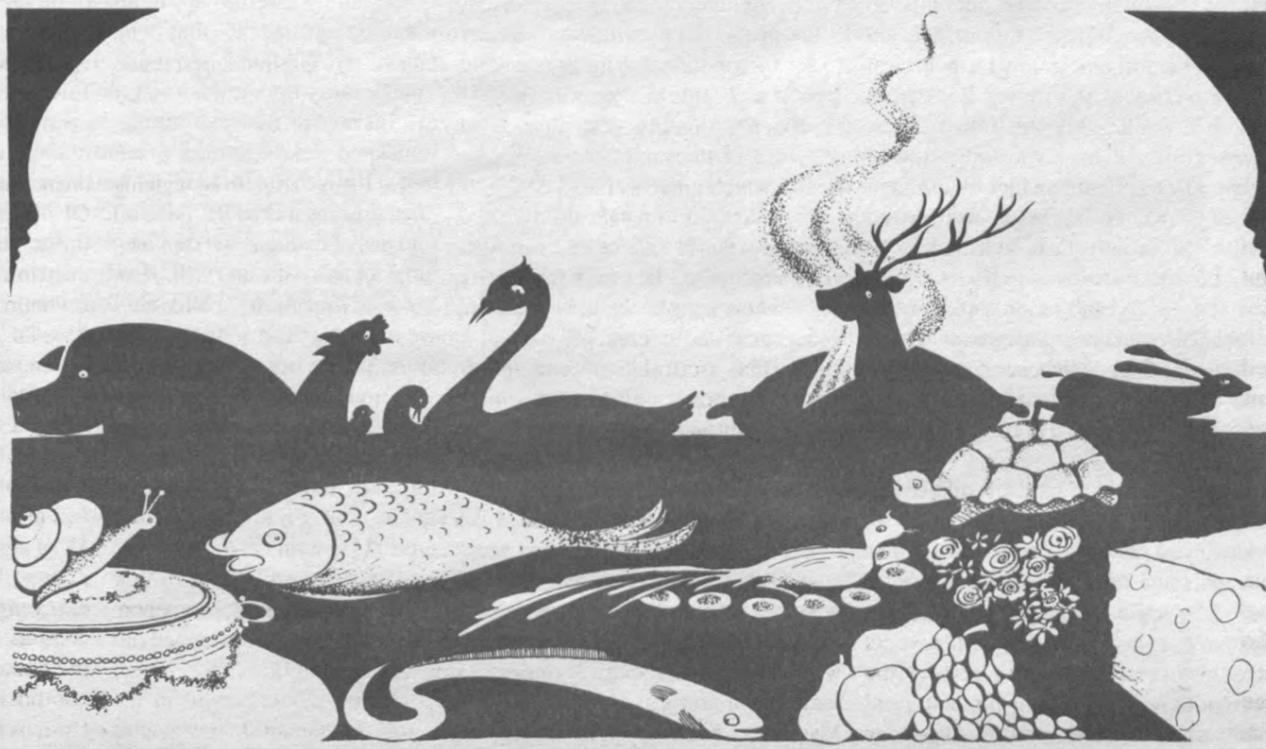


Illustration: Milly Acharya

faint. Other servants carried off the platform with the grass, fortress, pig and chicken, leaving me to wonder why they'd been there in the first place. But no one around me paid it any attention, including Elizabeth Wells, who chattered brightly with her mother while tossing me a glance now and then, which I caught with one raised eyebrow as I'd seen young rakes do with their darlings. I was getting bolder! A servant knelt before the bishop offering him a bowl of wine, but the bishop acted surprised, as though the poor sot had behaved with too much pomp. But I could see that Bishop Beaumont looked properly esteemed. Rituals like this of a homage refused were things they played out every day, I decided. When the bishop ate, two silver plates were set before him, one with food for himself, the other with an equal amount of the same food. Before beginning a course, he always waved the back of his hand as a signal that the second dish should be taken away and given to the poor while he ate the first. "Rich food is muck for poor stomachs," he said after doing this. "But it fills them just the same."

Well, I've never had such good muck, or in such quantities, but I pretended it was gruel just like everyone else, and ate just a few bites of each dish so the poor could have

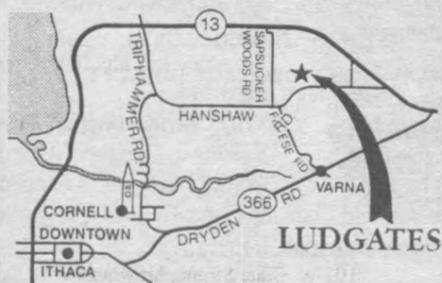
boiled eggs and plenty of saffron and cloves to flavor it. After that, which was only an appetizer, came hot roasted apples with white sugar plums cooked in sorrel, watercress, and rosemary, then a soup composed of six trout, six white herring, some freshwater eels (salted for twenty-four hours), plus three whiting soaked for twelve hours, served in a broth with ginger, saffron, cinnamon and sweetmeats. Then various side dishes were brought in to whet our palates for the main courses, things like porpoise with sauce, whole mackerel and soles, shad with verjuice, rice and fried almonds, jellies of crayfish, young rabbits and pork, and a dish I found so delicious I thought I had a hundred tongues all singing with the birds, consisting of new white cheese whipped up with eggs and sugar and simmered with mushrooms, leeks and bits of chicken, then garnished with roses, violets and primroses and all dyed blue with fresh-cut heliotropes.

But this was only the beginning. After a pause, we were served a puree of rice and mulberries sweetened with honey and flavored with wine and spices, along with calves' foot jelly with white wine and vinegar, an almond and chicken mousse, quinces in syrup, roast heron and snipe, bitterns, and a large dish of venison cooked in a spiced sauce of

At this point, four strong servants carried in a huge platter upon which sat what looked like a live swan, though it didn't move, with thirty or more cygnets in a circle around it, all in their plumage and seated on pastry-colored green to represent a grassy field. Eight banners of silk arranged around the platter displayed the bishop's arms, and the beaks of the mother and baby swans were gilded, while the plumage along their wings had been silvered. Since they didn't move, I assumed they'd been cooked, but wondered how anyone proposed to get past the feathers, not to mention the stomach and gizzard and other unpleasant plumbery inside which must have been roasted along with the birds if they hadn't been plucked or cut open; until, by the time a servant plopped one on my plate, I'd begun to feel queasy. But the same servant then turned the bird over, sliced some stitches in its belly, and removed its entire jacket of feathers to reveal a deliciously glazed and skinless bird inside still sizzling in its juices. The mother swan now alone on the platter was likewise unrobed and its meat carved and served, and each guest was given a share of its stuffing, which consisted, if I remember right, of crushed pepper, cooked brains, finely cut thrushes and fig-peckers, sausage

town could see us now, I thought, they'd grind us with their knuckles and lead us gladly to the slaughter. Nor was this all. Once the remains of the swan and cygnets were carried out somewhere to the unseen poor, the main course arrived. Remember that chicken and pig in the fortress? Four servants brought them in on the largest platter of all, now trussed and cooked yet moving as though they were still alive. That is, they twitched side by side while bubbling and steaming, and the muscles running underneath their skin actually rippled like water. Around them in a circle sat their apparent offspring, thirty or more cokentrics, one for each guest. These cokentrics were suckling pigs and small chickens cut in half, cleaned out and sewn to each other, the front half of the pig to the rear half of the chicken, and vice-versa. Each was stuffed with chestnuts, sweet potatoes, lemons, artichoke hearts, pickled barberries, oysters, lettuce stalks, peppers, cloves, currants, and hard-boiled duck eggs. As for the mother and father chicken and pig, they continued jumping, pulsating and thrashing around on the table, to the amusement of the guests, who already knew how the trick was done. I learned it too once the bishop told me. "These two

see *Prester*, page 14



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Misadventure in Cuba

Janice Levy

I had been in Cuba less than 24 hours when I was arrested. It was early Sunday morning and videomaker Alan Schroeder and I were walking through old Havana. Our new Cuban friend Guillermo was with us. I had stopped at a corner cafe to photograph; Alan was taping at a small dry-goods store across the street. Guillermo was with him.

Suddenly I was surrounded by three uniformed policemen with snub-nosed machine guns. They gestured angrily, speaking to me in Spanish. "What are they saying," I asked Alan as he approached, escorted by three more uniformed men. "There seems to be some kind of problem. They want us to go with them." "What have we done?" I asked. Alan shrugged. I looked at Guillermo. His pitch-black face possessed a kind of equine slenderness. He was barely twenty and a student at the University. For most of that morning he had escorted us around the streets of Old Havana with the confidence of a well-seasoned tour guide. Now, surrounded by our insisted captors, he looked terrified.

Alan and I were part of a group of eight Americans who had come to Cuba on a study tour to learn more about the Cuban health-care system. The trip had been organized by a woman named Marilyn Aguirre-Molina, whose sympathies with the Cuban political regime became clear during our brief orientation in Miami. Our ten days in Cuba had been tightly structured. We were to spend six days in Havana and four in Santiago de Cuba, a city located on the southern tip of the island. Attendance at all activities was mandatory, and our schedule would be given to us day by day. It was, Marilyn said, perfectly safe to wander around the streets—Cuba has a very low crime rate—and we should talk with whomever we pleased. "In Cuba," we were told, "people are free to do as they wish."

That particular morning, our compatriots were off on a preplanned excursion. Alan and I, quickly feeling the constraints of a schedule that did not allow much free time, feigned illness and struck out on our own.

We left the hotel before nine a.m. to meet up with Guillermo at the preappointed place, a set of yellow benches near an outdoor ice cream pavilion called the Copelia. The night before, the Copelia had been teeming with people, all waiting in line to buy dishes of ice cream. Now it was deserted. It was at this very spot that we had first met Guillermo. He had approached us with the exuberance of an old friend—an enthusiasm that initially had put us on guard. Marilyn had warned us to stay away from black-market money changers. "In Cuba," she had told us, "it is illegal for the people to possess foreign currency."

I quickly reconstructed the events of the morning, looking for a moment in which we might have given Guillermo some money. We had bought him a can of Coca-Cola, which he had gratefully accepted. The weather was hot, and walking around the dusty streets had made us

all quite thirsty. Guillermo had asked for another can to take to his brother. Had we bought it for him? Suddenly I couldn't remember. Yes, we had, only he had suggested that we give it to him when we parted. I slipped my hand into my camera bag. There, lodged between two lenses, was the sweaty can of Coke.

"C'mon" said Alan. "We're going."

While I had been trying to remember if we had done anything that could get Guillermo in trouble, Alan had been negotiating with our captors. "Where are they taking us?" I asked. "As far as I can tell," Alan responded, "to the police station."

The policemen surrounded us and we began walking down the street. Guillermo put his arm around my shoulder, as he had done the night before. It had made me uncomfortable.

"Alan," I had asked, "find out why he has his arm around me."

"He says that if it appears as though you are girlfriend and boyfriend we are less likely to get hassled by the police."

Guillermo had acted strangely that first night, not wanting to stop to rest, insisting that we keep moving. Each time he saw a policeman he

his slender waist. He was trembling.

By now we had created quite a scene. As we walked down the street, doors and windows closed. People scurried into alleyways. It felt like a movie in which one is at the same time participant and viewer. Even Guillermo, who had taken to babbling in a combination of German (his course of study) and Spanish, seemed to have been placed in the scene for comic relief. Not wanting to take the chance that our captors spoke English, Alan attempted communication in Pig Latin, a language in which he is fluent. "Oo-day oo-yay eek-spay ig-pay atin-lay" he asked. Remembering that phrase from when I was a child, I responded with an enthusiastic "Es-yay!" Unfortunately, that was all I could remember, for when Alan launched into his next monologue I was lost. "Never mind," he said, exasperated. "When we get to the police station, let me do the talking."

The police station was a dilapidated stucco building with an unassuming facade. Above the door hung a modest plaque, which read "Policia Nacional Revolucionario," the National Revolutionary Police. Like every other building we had seen, including our hotel, it was badly in

ID card from his breast pocket and handed it to the captain. "Do you suppose we did something to get him in trouble?" I asked. "Maybe it was the Coca-Cola. Suppose someone saw us giving him that can of Coke." "Who knows?" replied Alan. "Anything is possible. I wonder why no one has asked us for any identification."

"The problem is not with you, but with your friend" said the captain as he strutted toward us. "You two may leave." "What about Guillermo?" I asked Alan. "Find out what is going to happen to Guillermo." Alan's Spanish, although fairly fluent, was rusty, and my insistence that everything be translated was beginning to annoy him. "I'm getting to that," he said. "Just give me a chance." After a few minutes of dialogue the captain gestured for us to wait and walked away. "Okay," said Alan, "I told him that we are American tourists and that Guillermo is our friend. I told him that Guillermo has done nothing wrong, that he hasn't tried to change money or asked us to buy anything for him. I said that he was just acting as our tour guide and showing us around Havana."

"Yes, but will they let him go?"

official tour guides for these purposes."

In the presence of the captain, Alan repeated to Guillermo what he had said and risked further inflaming the situation by stressing that it was not our choice to abandon him. We left the police station not knowing if we would ever see him again.

Once outside, we were lost. We had walked a considerable distance from where we had been apprehended and were now completely disoriented. We had stopped about a block from the police station and were trying to get our bearings, when out of nowhere appeared a young man.

"Stay away from us," said Alan. "We have already gotten enough people in trouble."

We were still within eyeshot of the police station. Could this be a plainclothesman, I wondered. Who could this man be, and what did he want? The young man introduced himself as Leonardo. His voice was raspy and he was speaking quickly and breathlessly. Alan translated.

"He saw us being arrested and followed us. He has been waiting outside the police station. He wants us to know that this happens all the time. Cubans are routinely arrested



Expectant Mothers, Rural Hospital, Santiago de Cuba

Photograph: Janice Levy

would either put his arm around me or disappear, only to rejoin us a block or so later. When we invited him into our hotel for a cold drink, he refused, saying that he was not allowed into the hotel.

I found it difficult to believe that Guillermo thought he and I could be taken for companions. I was so obviously not Cuban. I didn't even speak Spanish. My clothing was that of a well-to-do tourist, and I had two monstrous and expensive-looking cameras hanging around my neck. Guillermo was wearing the same tattered shirt and grease-stained pants he had worn the night we met.

Deciding to go along with it anyway—after all, at this point what harm could it do?—I put my hand on

need of some basic maintenance and custodial attention.

Once inside we were immediately separated from Guillermo. Alan and I were instructed to sit on a wooden bench near the entrance; Guillermo was isolated in an adjacent open area. From my location I could see him quite clearly. He sat with his hands pressed between his knees, his head slightly bowed. The sun, streaming through a small window positioned high on the wall, illuminated the dusty air that swirled around him. Although my visual instinct told me to take a picture, common sense dictated no. A man we took to be the captain of the police station approached him. Guillermo produced a worn beige

I hated the thought of leaving him there. "When he comes back, tell him that we want to wait for Guillermo, that we had plans to go to the beach this afternoon."

"I'll give it a try," said Alan, "but I'm not sure how much good it will do. They want to keep him for questioning."

Moments later the captain returned. He and Alan exchanged a few more words.

"Did it work?" I asked. "No," said Alan, "we have to leave him here. He's letting us say goodbye, but that's all. We can't wait for him."

"What did he say when you told him about going to the beach this afternoon?" I asked.

"He said, 'In Cuba, we have

for talking to foreigners, even though tourists are told that it is okay. Our friend will be handcuffed and taken to another police station to be questioned. He will be fined and could be detained for up to three days in a dungeon."

The thought of our innocent young friend in some rat-infested dungeon sickened me. "Ask him how he knows."

"He says this has happened to him many times."

"Why take the chance?" I asked. "Talking to foreigners is the only way to find out what is happening outside Cuba. He says it is worth the risk."

With Leonardo's permission I continued on page 9

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photographed him and we exchanged addresses. He pointed us in the direction of the Hotel Capri and we parted.

When Marilyn heard what had happened, she appeared to be shocked. "Things like that just don't happen in Cuba," she said. "Your friend must have been wanted by the police. He is probably guilty of some crime. You must remember, this area is the 42nd Street of Cuba."

Later that evening we met with Julio, a low-level government employee assigned to our group for the duration of our stay in Havana. In his underpracticed English, Julio pressed us for details, demanding the name of our friend. "I'm sure that the police wanted your friend for some crime he has committed. In Cuba, you do not get arrested for talking to foreigners. You two should remember that this area is the 42nd Street of Cuba."

Coming from him, the 42nd Street analogy seemed absurd, and an obvious parroting of what Marilyn had said.

He apologized for any discomfort this incident may have caused and promised to look into the situation.

Now convinced that our room was bugged, Alan and I, in our paranoia, held all conversations related to the incident in the musty corridors and empty stairwells of the hotel. When in our room, we spoke in hushed tones and stood far away from the air vent—the location, we

surmised, of the bug. That evening, we ventured out into the streets to see if we could find Guillermo. We wandered past the Habana Libre, where, at night, revolutionary films are projected against the side of the building. We scanned the long line of people at the Copelia and periodically went back to our old meeting place—the set of yellow benches—to see if perhaps Guillermo was there. He was nowhere to be found.

Julio arrived at the hotel the next morning and, in a manner more cheerful than usual, declared that he had found out what had happened to our friend. "It was all a big mistake," he said. "The policeman who arrested you was a very stupid policeman. He mistook you for two other foreigners seen photographing in a restricted area the day before. When your friend cleared up the confusion, he was let go. I am sure that if you go out tonight you will find him."

Julio was right about one thing: that night, we did find Guillermo.

According to Guillermo, after we had left the police station he was handcuffed and taken to another location where he was detained for eight hours, questioned, and fined twenty pesos—approximately 30 percent of his monthly salary. Guillermo produced the beige identification card, which bore the date of the arrest, the fine, and the crime for which he was charged. The crime, "talking to foreigners."

Alan and I reimbursed him the twenty pesos, being careful not to be

seen giving him the money. Over a dish of mango ice cream at the Copelia, Guillermo told us of his plan to escape from Cuba. He was going to take a rubber raft to Florida.

"It's very dangerous," I said. Alan dutifully translated.

before, which had been the custom; rather, we were informed of our schedule moment by moment. We were never told when we would be returning to the hotel, and any effort to find out was met with vagueness and hostility. Blocks of time previ-

Marilyn took on a guarded and patronizing air.

Alan and I did manage to leave the hotel unchaperoned one more time. While the others were having lunch, we gathered our gear and headed off for the location of our arrest. Alan was producing a videotape of our journey and needed some extra footage. We retraced the steps we had taken with Guillermo and eventually found ourselves back in the old neighborhood.

"Look, Alan," I said, pointing to an enamel plaque on the side of the dry goods store he had been photographing the day we were arrested. "We're on the same street as the police station."

Had we really been so close? Why had it taken so long to get there? We could only assume that our captors had been looking to make an example of our arrest. Suddenly, Leonardo appeared.

"Did you find your friend?" he asked. Leonardo's second sudden appearance aroused suspicion. Was he perhaps a spy? "I live right over there," he said, pointing to one of a long line of connected stucco buildings. "Please, come meet my family."

We were taken through a long dark corridor past several open doors, each of which led to an apartment. From the construction of the building it was evident that none of these interior apartments could possibly include a window to the outside. The corridor was heavy with
see Misadventure, page 13



Photograph: Janice Levy

CDR Bloc Party, Santiago de Cuba

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said, 'Better to die at sea than live in Cuba.'"

Having this experience early on in our trip changed much of what was to follow. We no longer received the daily program the night

ously designated as "time on your own" were eliminated. Our trip to Santiago de Cuba was not certain until the night before we left, and Julio suddenly "decided" to accompany us so he could "have more opportunity to practice his English."

Cuba, Another View

Héctor Vélez-Guadalupe

Janice Levy's trip to Cuba was, to say the least, an unfortunate experience, although it is certainly not unusual in today's world. There are quite a few third-world countries in which I would advise Americans to leave their cameras in their hotels and to be suspicious of strangers approaching them and volunteering to serve as guides. Gayle T. Williams gives sound advice in her Gannett News Service article on traveling in Africa: "It may seem obvious to some, but travelers must remember that Africa is a foreign country (sic), not merely an extension of the United States. Customs are different, rules are different and visitors have to remember to follow the rules. For instance, don't assume that if something is stationary, you can photograph it."

Cuba is not only a foreign country, it is also a country under siege by the US for the last thirty years. The economic embargo with which the US has been strangling Cuba, (which President Bush further tightened in October through the sinister Torricelli Law, which punishes even western allies from trading with Cuba) has been condemned by the UN General Assembly. Little wonder, then, that American citizens visiting Havana, straying from the visiting group they came with, and walking with cameras

and accompanied by locals who may or may not be dissidents of the Revolution, could very well raise a red flag and be misconstrued as a threat to the country. Janice Levy is, of course, no threat to Cuba, and I know she sympathizes with the reasons for the Revolution. Her report is an honest portrayal of her experience, an experience that necessarily tainted everything else she saw and heard in the Island.

The problem is that, by itself, the report becomes just another American slap at the real tribulation that the Cuban government and people are going through. The popular media in the US are having a field day with reports of Cuban dissidents, hijackers turned heroes, and portraits of Cuban poverty and misery. Very little attention is paid to the fact that Fidel Castro is facing a Herculean task of reversing the economic shipwreck of his country, and that millions of Cubans are suffering because of the official US hatred of him. This is comparable to Iraq where hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed or maimed because of US enmity towards Saddam Hussein.

Those of us in academia, therefore, must bear in mind that what we write may very well add to the cacophony of negativity which readers are exposed to through the constant barrage of unkind and sometimes false images of "the bad guys." There is also no question in my mind that a government becomes

more repressive as it sees itself as a victim of external forces. Perhaps because of that growing repression in Cuba, internal mass opposition organizations have been kept to a minimum.

My own experiences in Cuba differ greatly from Professor Levy's. I was invited to Cuba (and funded by Ithaca College) with my colleague Dr. Felix Masud-Piloto, from DePaul University in Chicago, by Mercedes Arce Rodriguez, then Director of Centro de Estudios de Alternativas Políticas (CEAP) at the University of Havana. We met with the staff and faculty whenever we wanted, usually for the purpose of grilling them about Radio Marti (my interest) or about the causes and consequences of the Mariel boat lift of 1980 (Dr. Masud's interest). They were extremely helpful and we were free to use their documentation and library resources as needed. CEAP was made up of a fine cadre of scholars, and through them we made other useful contacts. One of these was Ernesto Rodríguez, an expert on Cuban immigration who, a few months later, was my guest here in Ithaca, having been invited by Binghamton University, of the State University of New York. Speaking about all these people, Dr. Masud, in his written report on our trip for the DePaul University Center for Latino Research, states: "They are careful researchers with serious analyses, sound interpretations and solid documentation."

Exchanging views with these colleagues was highly stimulating and useful."

We were also fortunate in that we were there during the 26 of July celebration. As most people know, that is somewhat the equivalent of July 4th for the US, and in Cuba the 26 of July is always a big celebration in which Castro himself gives the main speech. (And speeches they are, indeed. The man can talk for hours without the use of written notes. The term "the great communicator" has been misappropriated in the US to mean Reagan. I believe Castro is the one and only "great communicator.") We traveled to Matanzas to witness this event, and also to hear Nelson Mandela, President of the African National Congress, who was the guest speaker. Lost in a sea of over 100,000 people, we stood almost literally glued to one spot for nearly five hours, the first two of which were under the hot Caribbean sun. We felt the magnetism of these two leaders and were touched by the words, as well as by the emotional response of the crowd. Mandela spoke about his gratitude for the support he had always received from Cuba, and praised Cuba for its involvement in Angola against South Africa and racism. Fidel Castro, in turn, spoke about the continuing hardships of his country in the face of the "new world order" in which Cuba would feel very sharply the reduction of necessities, with more belt-

tightening mandatory. Although his speech was anything but encouraging, the crowd did not seem to tire of standing or listening. "I'd like to say more, but I feel so sorry for all of you standing there..." Fidel would say. The crowd would yell back: "More, Fidel, more." And Fidel would comply, only to repeat the phrase after an hour or so, and to get the same response from the crowd.

Times have, of course, worsened in Cuba since then. During the 26 of July speech, Castro asked his people to "do more with less." Since then, people have been forced to do less with much, much less. In its three-part article on Cuba in the week of January 11 of this year, the *New York Times* points out that even cats are being eaten in Cuba. What was a 12-ounce monthly ration of chicken per family has now been reduced to nothing. Soap has been unavailable for years now, and paper is almost nonexistent. During my trip, I traveled from Havana to Trinidad, with stopovers in various town and country areas. (Another contrast with Professor Levy is that Dr. Masud and I are both Latinos, he originally from Cuba, and I from Puerto Rico. That may make things easier in terms of getting around without standing out). I found then that, in terms of food, life in the country was better than urban life. The country people we met and stayed with had pigs, and chickens,
see Cuba, page 13

Jazz Colors

continued from page 1

modest people, many of wide experience, and focus intently on what they have to say about jazz, its players, and its social and political contexts.

Neither difficult nor esoteric nor archly hip, they take varied approaches to the twenty-five or so musicians upon whom the chapters focus.

A few examples:

The opening piece of *Waiting for Dizzy* begins by discussing the recent release of brilliantly re-engineered recordings of the 1920s and '30s, achieved by the Australian Robert Parker, then shifts into a pointillist essay on the evolution of the century's music through depression, war, racial enmity, musical ignorance, and the brutality of world politics.

An interview with the late guitarist Emily Remler takes us into the difficult world of women in jazz, and reflects on the familiar tragedy of the artist dying before her music and life can be fully shaped.

The brief piece on the late legendary guitarist Lenny Breau (called "Boy Lost") considers the influence of country musicians on jazz, especially guitarists, and begins with this deceptively shaped tribute:

Lenny Breau was an odd little guy, delicate, dishevelled, bohemian, and shy. He had a raggedy mustache and slightly woolly dark hair that was receding from his forehead, and he looked like what he was, French by origin, probably Norman French. Chet Atkins, whose conversation about guitar is liable to range from Charlie Christian through Jim Hall to Segovia and Bream, once called him "the best guitar player in the world today."

It may be sometimes frustrating, in pieces on Remler, Breau, and other dead players, when Lees says their recorded work doesn't reflect their abilities in live performance—but rarely does he tease us so with lost chords. When he does, however, we should be reminded that the unrepeatability of the spontaneous moment is the essence of jazz, and the direct experience of this can be ignored and forgotten by record collectors who have stayed at home memorizing all the solos.

One of Lees' special pleasures is in relating stories of musicians

about their colleagues, especially stories that attack stereotypes or received opinions. It rights the balance to hear guitarist Herb Ellis praise Oscar Peterson's profundity (contradicting the cliché that Peterson is merely a "technical" player), and to hear drummer Ed Thigpen speak admiringly of Buddy Rich's swing and finesse. Always, when these players talk about each other, you are encouraged to listen again for what you missed when you were under the sway of some hoary old saw about jazz. The title piece of the second book, a sort of salon (or series of solos) on Dizzy Gillespie, introduces us in turn to Phil Woods, Benny Golson, Chico O'Farrill, the producer Creed Taylor, Art Farmer, Flora Purim, Airto, and Charlie Haden, all of whom have pungent things to say while waiting for Dizzy.

There is little musicology here, but Lees' asides on techniques of playing, and on what certain instruments can and can't do, are quite informative—the chapters on string players especially (how certain musicians violated the accepted technique, say, of holding a violin, or a guitar, and how little this mattered). In the midst of an interview with trombonist Al Grey, a brief disquisition on the history of brass in jazz tells us that Jack Teagarden, because his arms were short as a child, figured out ways to play notes without using the slide. We learn that Al Grey's son is a trombonist, and knows techniques such as circular breathing which his father does not; this pointing, as Lees often does, to the family and community persistence of the music.

the BOOKPRESS

Despite this persistence, you are always aware that too soon the few living geniuses of the seminal periods of jazz will be gone, and no one will replace them. Lees is attracted to elegists such as Jobim and Bill Evans, and so, of more than necessity, Lees is an elegist too. He tracked down Bill Challis (who wrote for Bix Beiderbecke, and whom Benny Carter called "my idol") and trombonist Spiggle Willcox (who played at Cornell in 1922-1923, still lives near Cortland, and was leaving to play on a jazz cruise right after the interview), knowing they are not going to be around too much longer. His piece on Spike Robinson, who is playing tenor again full-time after thirty years as an aeronautics engineer, is full of elation at a man who couldn't stay away from the music, a man who transfixed Zoot Sims the first time Zoot heard him. Valuable history is recorded in Lees' talks with Grey, pianist Hank Jones, and

studios. Older players such as Al Grey, who "went to white schools and lived around whites all my life," seem less angry than deeply regretful about the waste of it:

Jimmie Lunceford played the black universities and colleges all over the country. We couldn't get to play downtown in New York. We always had to play at the Renaissance and the Apollo in Harlem. We predominantly played for blacks, and that was one of the bad things, we thought—we had such a great band....

And worse perhaps:

So I went...to Lionel Hampton, where we had a lot of routines where we had to clap our hands... Coming from Lunceford to clapping your hands with white gloves, I really just didn't think that had anything actually to do with the music, or the

devised...had nothing to do with the culture, or rather cultures, of Africa. The music caters to opulent ofays on shivery adventures into the "primitive" world of darkest Harlem....It is demeaning to everyone involved. I find nothing romantic about memories of the Cotton Club.

In addition to lambasting white society and particularly the music business for its distortions of black music, Lees takes strong exception to the popular notion that white contributions to that music have been merely derivative and expendable. In *Waiting for Dizzy* he attacks French critic Andre Hodeir's pronouncement to him in 1958 that "no white man contributed anything to the development of the music." The keystone piece, entitled "Bix and Bill," is a thorough and searching refutation of Hodeir's statement, citing several great black players to the contrary: Rex Stewart, Lester Young, Art Tatum, Herbie Hancock, Anthony Braxton, Miles Davis. The essay ultimately focuses on the influence of Bix Beiderbecke and Bill Challis, especially by way of the Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman orchestras. The climax is his account of how, playing Challis's arrangements, the Goldkette band overwhelmed Fletcher Henderson's band at the Roseland Ballroom in the late 1920s; Lees makes his case through the testimony of Henderson trumpeter Rex Stewart and others who were there, and through the reports of people who heard Goldkette's New England tour in 1926.

Rex Stewart wrote in his Jazz Masters of the Thirties, "We were supposed to be the world's greatest dance orchestra. And up pops this Johnny-come-lately white band from out in the sticks, cutting us....We simply could not compete. Their arrangements were too imaginative and their rhythm too strong...."

Unfortunately the Goldkette pieces arranged by Challis were never recorded:

The Goldkette boys were anxious to record the Challis charts. It wasn't to be. If we owe it to White-man that those arrangements still exist, we owe it to a man named Eddie King—the archetype of the tin-eared record producer—that we do not

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Photograph: Norman Granz

Count Basie and Zoot Sims, 1975

altoist/trumpeter/arranger Carter.

Lees' anger at the racist attitudes that scarred many of the players (and the history) of this music is everywhere evident, and it cuts both ways. Often he reminds us of the racial exclusion of black players—on the road and in the clubs and the

playing. It got to me...I thought it was Uncle Tomming and the minstrel scene.

Lees' comments about Ellington and the Cotton Club extend this theme:

The painted exoticism that Ellington

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have the Goldkette performances of them. King didn't like jazz, and he specifically disliked Bix, objecting to his harmonic innovations, his "wrong note" playing. His attitude foreshadowed one that Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie would encounter.

This piece also reminds us of another key fact about jazz: always and everywhere, great music has been performed by musicians who are never recognized except by those who have a chance to hear them in person. Anyone who has traveled with an ear to local music scenes knows this to be true.

Some of the players like it that way. The jazz musicians he knows, says Lees, are gentle men and women, "sensitive and cultivated, and very middle class. They don't consider themselves outcasts." Few of them are avid for glory or fame; they play for the passion, but they are realists about the music they play, and know about the inevitable distortions and sorrows of seeking fame in it. The way "Bix and Bill" focuses on two white men who were shy and seemed to have little personal stake in their own histories (in retrospect almost a character flaw, Lees gently says) is very poignant and conceptually telling.

Lees says that early associations of white and black musicians in the clubs and recording studios and on the road were more common than is usually appreciated:

So much fuss has been made over the hiring of Teddy Wilson by Benny Goodman that one is left with the impression that blacks and whites did not previously play together. Composer Milton Babbitt, who played jazz clarinet when he was a boy growing up in the south, said that mixed performances were quite common during that time, and that he played in funeral services himself. The Waller session with Eddie Condon, the Wingy Manone session with Dicky Wells and Jelly Roll

Morton, were apparently not considered ground-breaking....I had believed that mixed groups performed only on recordings, but Babbitt refutes even that.

And Lees suggests that the white public's ignorant and racist identification of jazz with black "outcasts," which created so many problems for black musicians, plagued white musicians as well.

That jazz is a creation of black geniuses inevitably troubles white listeners and players with the uneasy sense of being interlopers or pretenders in another culture. The racial guilt accumulated over the past generation especially often means that white adulation of Armstrong and Ellington and Charlie Parker and Dizzy and Miles Davis and Mingus and Sonny Rollins and Monk and Bud Powell has been more than tinged with a sense of regret at being white. But Lees is right to remind us that while Armstrong, Bechet, Ellington, Hawkins, Parker, Gillespie, Young, and Monk "made the massive cultural achievement of jazz in less than thirty years," the music has absorbed creative influences from everyone who has played it with honesty, brilliance, and passion, regardless of their race.

Perhaps the most important thing to say about the race issue and jazz is that for over sixty years black and white players have come together in a common effort, to swing together, to testify, to listen to and learn from each other, and to support each other in pushing the music forward. Without ignoring its own ugly racial episodes, I think the jazz life has given us a profoundly important example of mutual esteem among races. Lees' documentation of this cooperative effort over generations produces a rich, inspiring image of American history that, like working people's history of labor struggle in the US, has been shoved aside by our official custodians.

It produces also images of sub-

versive freedom. Speaking of his return from engineering to the jazz life, Spike Robinson says,

'I can be in the worst position—I just missed a train, my bag's heavy, I'm frustrated. I think, "Oh shit, why did I do this?" And then I think, "Ooooooh, well, but yeah, you could be in a three-hour quality control meeting." And then I feel wonderful again.'



Photograph: Charles Stewart

Dizzy Gillespie, 1962 from Charles Stewart's *Jazz Files*

And bassist Charlie Haden says, *Improvisation teaches you the magic of being in the moment you're living in....And you see yourself in relation to the universe in a completely different way. There's no such thing as yesterday, there's no such thing as tomorrow. When you're touching music, you see your extreme unimportance.*

✦

Joel Ray is an editor of the Bookpress.

Dizzy Days

Gloria Grasmuck

In the mid-forties I met Dizzy Gillespie at Birdland through Charlie Parker, who was helping a poet friend of mine make a film about bop. If we had been able to keep the camera out of hock just long enough to finish it,

a new form would have been given to the Beat Generation's veneration of bop musicians. Our hero worship was for their attitude and resulting style of being, rather than a musical style—coolness and hipness, of course (which

bolically, and was dancing with Katherine Dunham, trying to stop thinking for awhile.

Dizzy was a big help in this. I don't remember exactly how our Sunday afternoon excursions began—but with him nothing needed a reason. Somehow we started this ritual of meeting just for fun. He was happily married and a wonderful change from some men and gay women who had been making me feel responsible for their sexual frustration. I felt pursued and cornered, and Dizzy provided a sense of freedom at least once a week. In his old car we went places together that mostly interest kids—usually the Central Park zoo. Dressed in some weird outfit with a crazy hat, normally a fez, he'd pick me up in the lobby of my hotel and we'd laugh at the stir we always caused (even the most conventional interracial couples were big attractions then). We'd cruise up 5th Avenue slowly with him leaning out the window repeating like an incantation, "Hey, doorman, where's the zoo, man?" Far from embarrassing me, these Dizzy impulses that he liked to make into rituals gave me relief from my anxieties by forcing a new reality around them. The trip to wherever we were going was as important as our destination. Our days at the zoo or a museum or having a picnic in New Jersey were like an afternoon at the races or a night at the opera with the Marx brothers. We had exactly the same sense of humor, he and I, which I've come to believe is the best bond of all.

That summer turned out to be the high point in our friendship. We spent time together twice after that—once in Miami Beach briefly, and again in the sixties in Mexico City where he and his band were performing. After the show they all squeezed into my small apartment and I had a frenetic American reprieve from a lugubrious Aztec exile, but nothing ever was as great as the old Sunday afternoons, at least as I remembered them.

✦

Gloria Grasmuck is a painter and poet who lives in northern New York.

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Vernon

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Letter, but some of the short stories, too, which tend toward the fantastic but also tend to be set in historical times.

CF: To come back to your own writing, in *Peter Doyle* I thought your description of Greeley, Colorado was a great reversal of expectations. We always think of intrepid pioneers, not people who've been given money and land and transported halfway across the continent. They didn't have to trek to Colorado.

JV: Again, I was deliberately trying to write about a pivotal period which allowed me to look back, but at the same time, I could look forward, too. The big difference there was the transcontinental railroad, which had all but been completed at the time that the colony of Greeley was founded. So people could just get on the train and in three days be at the end of the line in their new town, their city in the wilderness, or what used to be the wilderness.

CF: And Wyoming as hell.

JV: You mean the scene where Jo actually winds up there. Do you know the West very well? Could you guess where that was set?

CF: Yes, I had a very vivid sense. I used to live in Colorado, so I had a good picture.

JV: I'm thinking particularly of when Jo meets a cannibal named Pat Lynch, and he's trapped in his cave. That's in what is now Dinosaur National Monument. Not the part where the fossils and the bones are, but the more scenic part where the Yampa and the Green River come together. You can drive up on a very high mesa and look down on the confluence of the rivers. It's incredible country, it's so beautiful.

CF: The description of the country is like a human body, which seems to tie in with the beginning of the book.

JV: That's another thing historical novelists are doing now — trying to reconstitute the presence of the human body in history. It's something that historians don't pay much attention to, unless it's their speciality, like the history of medicine or the history of sexuality. Or unless they're the new kinds of

thinkers represented by people like Foucault or the *Annales* historians. But if you're really trying to recreate what the feel and the heat and the cold of history were like, then it's a bodily reality that you have to imagine.

CF: The question of gender appears as a central theme in your novel, from the Indians to Peter Doyle. That brings to mind the matter of having a character named Peter when you're worried about the fate of Napoleon's penis.

JV: Right. I was also thinking of the historical Peter Doyle, who was a friend of Whitman's, but I felt pretty free to essentially create an entirely fictional character out of the little factual information we have. As far as we know, Doyle never even lived in New York City. Whitman knew him in Washington, D.C., where he was a streetcar driver. There's a section in one of Whitman's private notebooks where he writes to himself in code that he has to renounce Peter Doyle. But he's becoming too attached to him; he writes something about how feminine Peter is, and this presumably has something to do with why he wants to break off relations with him. I moved Doyle further north in order for him to get away from Whitman, and then even moved him out to the American West. There's no evidence whatsoever that he was involved in that. So I was telling a lot of different stories and kind of weaving them together in ways they hadn't been woven together in history.

JS: At the same time you have all these questions of gender, from the manly love of Whitman, to questions of the roles of males and females, both in Indian culture and in Anglo-American culture. There's also the

character Bonny, who I can't help think is some kind of cross between Frankenstein's monster and Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*, because he says, "I wants it, I wants it."

JV: You've put your finger on two figures I was thinking of in making him.

JS: But I wonder, especially since he was a Frankenstein who was not completely made, how that related in your mind to all the rest of the gender questions. So much of what people were able to do, or what others perceived they could do, depended on whether they were wearing a bonnet or not. Bonny has

Isn't it ironic to call somebody who's supposed to be made in the image of Napoleon Bonaparte a female name—Bonny—rather than Boney? That is all part of the gender play, and part of the parody of a culture in which males are so in love with their genitals that they use them as weapons, or they use surrogate weapons as penises. That all kind of radiated out from the central idea that is probably not true, that Napoleon's prick was stolen after his death.

I should show you some of the things that I've received since that novel came out. One is a catalog in which Napoleon's penis was first offered for sale. Before Christie's got hold of it, it was in a collection of Napoleana that was offered for sale by the Flayderman Company, Purveyors of Military and Nautical Antiquities, in Connecticut. This company still exists, and Mr. Flayderman himself sent me this catalog, which I think is something of a collector's item now. Among the items offered for sale are Napoleon's death mask, dueling pistols, silver cups, a handkerchief, a lock of hair, and of course, his penis: "An incredible, macabre, and yet most fascinating relic. Encased under glass in a specially made leather-

x-ray of Napoleon's penis. JS: How did they know it was the real McCoy? JV: How can anyone know? It could be a picture of a window in a darkened church, or something. Actually, the reason given for doing this was to determine the presence of arsenic in the skin and in the pubic hairs. How the x-ray contributes to that, I really don't know. But at one point there was a harebrained theory that he was gradually poisoned by somebody on St. Helena, over a long period of time. People presumably analyzed locks of his hair and found large amounts of arsenic. So I think the man who owned what is supposed to be Napoleon's penis thought that an x-ray might be one way of verifying it. CF: [Reading from the catalog entry] "A maltreated strip of buckskin shoelace, or a shriveled eel."

JV: Since my novel was published, and since the essay came out in the *Company*, *Times*, the story's been picked up in Europe, in *Der Spiegel* and some French magazines. In France, historians have concluded that there's just no evidence whatsoever that the thing offered in this collection is authentic. The owner wants to do a DNA test. But I guess that would mean exhuming Napoleon, which the French government would never agree to. Besides, it would be totally impractical. He's sealed inside eight concentric coffins of lead and concrete, and that huge, monumental ebony casket on display in Paris. They're never going to open that up. But that's one of the things that fascinates me. It's related to this new historical fiction. Historical legends are part of history, too, just as folk tales are. They're a window into history every bit as much as the language of the past and the so-called historical and documentary evidence. So the story that Napoleon's penis was stolen, and that people went around looking for it, doesn't have to be historically accurate in the narrow sense to be accurate in a wider sense, as a representation of a society whose narrow definition of maleness creates a phallogocentric culture.

Chris Furst lives and writes in Ithaca. Jeff Schwaner lives in Mecklenburg.



Photograph: Colin Ray

John Vernon

no sex to prove his gender, yet he is the only undying force—besides the wilderness—in the entire book.

JV: I don't know if there's any profound answer to what you're asking, but historically the British referred to somebody they called Boney, not Bonny. I changed that a little bit, partly in order to play with the notion that he's not male because he doesn't have a penis. But he never had one, so was he ever male, or what is male, and what is female?

covered box bearing a gold-embossed crown. A rather unpleasant-looking piece of desiccated tissue, politely referred to in the Rosenbach Catalog as a 'mummified tendon,' taken from Napoleon's body during the postmortem, which in actuality is the emperor's organ through which urine is ejected and intercourse conducted (his penis)." And then I received something even more amazing—what purports to be an

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ON THE AVENUE
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Cuba

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the smell of cooking cabbage. A small child chased a chicken, screaming with delight each time it came close to catching it.

"This is mama," Leonardo announced as we entered through the steamy kitchen of his apartment. A portable electric range with two glowing spiral elements supported three dented aluminum pots. Their lids clanked noisily. I traced the frayed cord of the range to a charred wall socket.

Adjoining the kitchen was a small room crammed with furniture. On the wall hung a likeness of Che Guevara and a mold-stained photograph of Fidel. A black-and-white television set, not unlike the one I remembered my grandparents owning when I was a small child, sat in the corner of the room. I wondered if

it worked. While Leonardo's mother prepared coffee for us, Alan conducted an on-camera interview with Leonardo.

Leonardo began by telling us what had happened after we had left him the other day. He too had been taken into custody by the police, who apparently had been watching us. They confiscated the addresses we had given to him and told him that we were working for the CIA. They went on to tell him that the photographs I took of him would be used in pornographic magazines, his face superimposed on the body of an animal.

Leonardo spoke candidly about life in Cuba. Our brush with the law was only one small indication of the repression and brutality of Castro's regime. He told us about the CDR, the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, an organization whose job it is to flush out anti-

socials. Members of the CDR could be your neighbors, friends, even your own family. Oftentimes there was no way of telling. He had taken a risk by bringing us to his home and by speaking so freely.

"Be careful," he said. "Should this tape fall into the wrong hands I will go to prison for a long time."

Alan labeled the tape "Christmas 1990" and for the rest of the trip we carried it with us at all times.

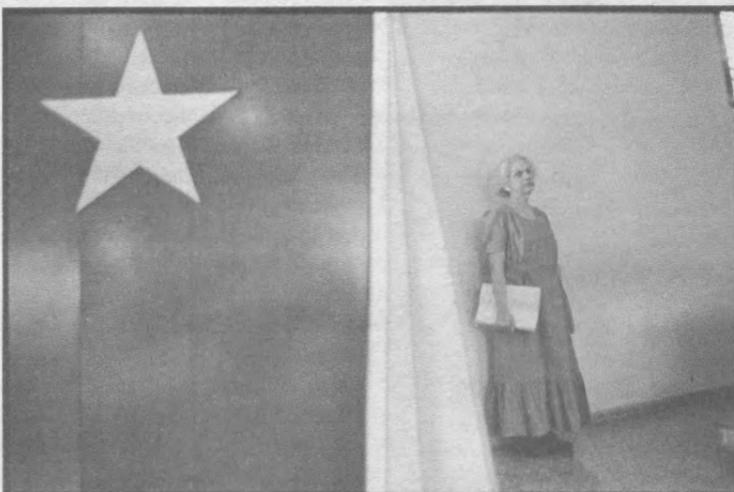
In the week or so remaining, we

visited numerous clinics, hospitals, day-care centers, and schools. We were impressed by the apparent efficiency and egalitarianism of each operation. Since the United States imposed its embargo on Cuba in 1960, trade had been limited to the Soviet Bloc countries and to China. Now, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, Cuba has lost an important trading partner. Restricted access to material goods and technological information has forced a number of

businesses to close. Food is in very short supply and there is talk of further increasing rationing. Fuel is scarce and a contract with China for the acquisition of one million bicycles was already in the works. A people who had been promised much by the Triumph of the Revolution was understandably disillusioned and scared.

While in Santiago de Cuba I met a young man who summarized the sentiment of many others we had encountered. He said, in broken English, "In Cuba, there are two things that are good, the education system and the health care system. But I am not sick every day."

Janice Levy is an assistant professor of photography at Ithaca College. Photographs from her trip to Cuba in 1991 are on display at Ithaca College's Handwerker Gallery through February 28.



Photograph: Janice Levy

Cuba

continued from page 9

and rice, and a variety of vegetables to eat, since they had the space to grow them. This was, of course, no help for urbanites who depend upon food rationing, which in turn depends upon truck deliveries, which depends upon the availability of moving vehicles and the existence of fuel.

There is no question in my mind, based upon my travel experiences and upon what I continue to learn from the Island as well as from US media that Cuba is facing the worst crisis in its revolutionary history. Recognizing this, however, is not to affirm what the critics of the Cuban

revolution see as a failure uniquely traceable to Fidel Castro. The myopic foreign policy makers in Washington are the real creators of the Cuban nightmare. In view of the fact that every country in the world today—even the US—must relate with other countries, cultures, economic systems, and world views in order to maintain itself as a viable and dynamic entity within the world of nations, it is criminal to isolate a country, millions of people, from the confraternity of nations. When a small country is thus isolated and oppressed by the most powerful and dominant nation on earth, the results

Patient, The Mental Institution at Mazorra

are devastating for the weak nation. To blame the small nation's government for the results would be laughable if it weren't tragic.

It is within this context that Professor Levy's report must be read. Cuba does not behave defensively out of paranoia. Cuba is indeed under constant strangulation by the world's most powerful nation. Its

people are suffering under situations unimaginable by most Americans. The above-mentioned *New York Times* articles on Cuba, although not meant to be flattering to Castro, state that "from time to time, Mr. Castro betrays what seems to be flashes of pain" at seeing the poverty of his countrymen. It seems that the *New York Times*, from time to time, is

forced to admit that Mr. Castro is human. And so should we all admit that all societies are human creations, which need the infusion of other societies and other human beings to enrich themselves and replenish their ideologies, and redefine their goals. Putting Cuba in isolation because the US does not like Castro can only lead to further suffering by the Cuban population, and further defensive acts of repression by a government under siege.

Héctor Vélez-Guadalupe, Associate Professor of Sociology at Ithaca College, visited Cuba in July 1991.

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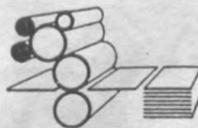
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Hunger

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the need for them in the first place. Property rights are an important aspect of all societies. It matters very much who owns and controls the productive resources, in which way, and on what basis. It also matters for what purpose the assets are used. For example, in our own time, productive resources tend to be owned privately, and deployed for personal profit and unlimited individual accumulation. The rural and agricultural sector conforms to this arrangement in the majority of places, though the "commodification" of food is clearly much more advanced in the industrialized countries.

Making food a commodity like any other has both positive and negative consequences. On the production side, a very big plus is the increased productivity and output of the sort associated with the Green Revolution. However, these gains come at the cost of an overly intensive and wasteful use of farm inputs, especially scarce energy and water resources. Also, this method of production reduces farm employment, destroys the land physically, and encourages concentration in ownership. These outcomes have been observed in both industrialized and Third World countries. On the consumption side, the transformation of food into a commodity converts what was once an essentially social link between an important human need and its fulfillment, into a commercial one. One result has been that even the richest countries have never fully solved the problem of hunger; indeed, it is once again a serious and growing menace in many parts of the West. In the poor nations, this set of arrangements helps to keep in place the ironic situation questioned by Pierre Spitz, another UNRISD researcher, in the *International Social Science Journal* in 1978: "How is it that . . . the men and women who

sowed the seeds, harvested the crops and minded the herds have perished for lack of food? How is it that they died of hunger in those parts of the world, whereas most of the people who do not produce foodstuffs were spared?"

Barraclough's major shortcoming is that he does not deal explicitly with such systemic influences, even though he touches upon them



Illustration: Fernando Llosa

throughout his book. Indeed, he goes to the other extreme and eschews questions of private versus public property, market forces versus central planning, and capitalism versus socialism as "grossly misleading simplifications," relegating them to the status of "pseudo-dilemmas." Here he does the wrong thing for the right reason. It is true, as he says, that most societies are a mixture of private and public, of markets and planning, and that, as far as food security is concerned, differing combinations of all these attributes have been present in successful and unsuccessful countries. It is also true that there are very few, if any,

the BOOKPRESS

clear variants of one or the other social system or mode of production (essentially capitalism and socialism in our day and age). And there is no doubt either that many debates formulated in these terms tend to be trite and dogmatic. But none of this is reason to warrant dismissing the distinctions themselves as spurious. If practice is complex and not so easily categorizable, our ways of thinking about it imperfect and wanting, and some of the people involved narrow-minded and obstinate, then the redress is to recognize these failings and remedy them, and not peremptorily declare structural differences to be inconsequential or invalid. Capitalist societies that are heavy on public planning turn out to be quite different from socialist ones that involve markets, even though both plans and markets are present in both. It matters very much what is the base and what the enlargement.

It is clear from Barraclough's treatment of the topic that the answer to the question posed in his title is a resounding no, at least for the indefinite future. It is a pity that he does not state as much clearly and unequivocally somewhere in the book. We desperately need voices of his caliber and standing to constantly point out the acute and deteriorating nature of the international food problem. Too many others are either paying no attention at all, or suggesting by omission that it will be adequately resolved, in a not too untoward length of time, staying the course that we have currently set. This expectation is incontrovertibly wrong. Judging from this superior book, Barraclough seems to believe so.

Prester

continued from page 7

animals," he said, "have been carefully deboned, then quantities of mercury placed in their cavities before they were cooked, with the result you now see. But you are cautioned not to eat them, my friend. May I call you my friend?" By this time, since the wine hadn't stopped pouring, everyone was calling everyone else their friend, with plenty of touching and clawing with greasy fingers of the sleeves and shoulders of neighbors, while the musicians had started playing again, a more throbbing tune now, and laughter in bucketfuls issued from mouths grotesquely distended from so much eating.

"Yes you may," I said.

Nor was this the end. Once we'd eaten enough of the cokentrices, the servants removed our plates and goblets, then removed the whole tablecloth by wrapping it from either end to hold the garbage inside, and brought out a fresh cloth—fresh goblets too—then carried in chessboards, one for every two guests. But this withered me because I'd never learned to play. Elizabeth Wells, my partner, smiled—revealing snippets of gristle in her teeth—wiped her fingers on her sleeve, then moved a piece, unconcerned about where it landed, I thought. Others moved their pieces also up and down the table, without especially indulging in the agonies of thought our monks always displayed when they sat to play chess.

So I chose a piece on my side of the board from the first row, like hers, and moved it in more or less the same way, whereupon she nudged her own piece ahead with the back of her fingers and then, to my amazement, snapped up my piece and popped it in her mouth, chewing sublimely. Beside me, a lord did the same thing, ate one of his partner's pieces. Well—my sluggish mind shrugged, I moved something, grabbed, and quickly devoured two of her pieces, not realizing at first that they were made out of sugar, so I swallowed them whole. She threw back her head and laughed with abandon, and then, as though demonstrating a local custom, daintily lifted one of my pieces—shaped to look like a bishop, I noticed—bit off its head, ran her tongue across her lips, and by the dents in her cheeks and her rolling eyeballs, made it clear that one took exquisite pleasure not in wholesale swallows but in gentle sucks and chews, of these pieces.

In this manner, we ate all the chess men. Since the board turned out to be made from sweetmeats, we ate that too. And the other guests ate theirs. Then I sat there and imagined cleaning the hands of Elizabeth Wells after such a rich meal by gently sucking each of her fingers, in turn.

+

John Vernon teaches English literature and creative writing at Binghamton University. He is the author of three novels, *La Salle*, *Lindbergh's Son* and *Peter Doyle*.

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Letters

continued from page 2

Caponigro Re-Viewed

To the Editor:

In 1867 Gustave Flaubert, writing to Alfred Baudry expressed his repugnance at paintings that require accompanying texts. Flaubert's letter reads in part, "The explanation of one artistic form by another is a monstrosity. You won't find in all the museums of the world a good picture that needs a commentary. Look at exhibition catalogues. The longer the entry, the worse the painting."

The Paul Caponigro photography show recently on view at the Johnson Museum and reviewed in the December '92 issue of *Bookpress* includes extensive commentaries by Mr. Caponigro which, though not directed at any specific work, refer to the exhibition as a whole.

Verbal embellishment is essential to Mr. Caponigro's work for the following reason. In establishing an identity, overcoming the depersonalizing tyranny of the lens is a serious obstacle for photographers.

Some such as Arbus, Mapplethorpe or Adams skirt the problem by concentrating on a particular motif and become known as chroniclers of freaks, erotic sex, and extravagances of nature. Mr. Caponigro, to his credit, casts a wider net but in so doing offers images that might have been made by any number of first-class photographers. Having put himself at risk he is then compelled to resort to an alternative strategy as a means of insuring that his efforts will be recognized as Caponigros.

It is by the inclusion of texts that Mr. Caponigro attempts to invest his work with a personal vision. A quintessential romantic, he asks us to listen to his lyrical rhapsodies as we look at his images. A grove of trees for example, which is indistinguishable from an Adams photo of a similar motif, then takes on mythical and mystical meanings.

A truly more creative approach would be to take that grove of trees for what it is, and then through the implementation of imagination and formal invention, transform it into a work of art. And that of course is precisely where photography falls short.

Arnold Singer
Ithaca, New York

Labor

continued from page 1

"house organs" without pulling any punches at their bosses in the union hierarchy. And they exhibit a refreshing willingness to examine their own cop-outs and compromises.

Editor Matt Witt confesses *The Mineworker's* avoidance of controversy surrounding the effects of strip mining in a way no in-house corporate reporter would dare. Veteran daily newspaper reporter Pat Ziska asks in the Foreword, "Can you imagine anybody who sups at corporate America's propaganda buffet writing this kind of book about the kept corporate press?"

The book also envisions not only democratic, progressive, well-designed and well-written in-house labor publications, but a national labor daily. Pizzigati writes, "What a difference a daily paper by and for labor could make, in living rooms, in classrooms, in newsrooms across the United States. A labor daily could give working people everywhere a common point of reference—and force other media outlets to cover stories they would otherwise ignore. America's information dynamics would never be the same."

But he is forced to conclude that "at this point in American history the labor movement can barely sustain itself, let alone a daily newspaper." He moves on to argue that in the immediate future labor needs a national forum for debate and discussion. His chief analogy is to the computer world trade press. "The best of these publications—

weeklies like *Infoworld*—offer penetrating analysis that go behind the scenes to explain what's happening in the industry and why. Dumb ideas are ridiculed, provocative ideas debated."

The writers in Pizzigati and Solowey's book are union "insiders" with particular union visions who are simultaneously journalist "outsiders" with specific critiques of labor and the labor press. There is no academic detachment here.

AD: Whether a new labor press can succeed depends a lot on top labor leadership. How aware of the shortcomings of their own publications are most labor leaders?

FS: Organized labor has had to start paying better attention to what works and what doesn't. The writing's on the wall. Labor leaders have noted the new attacks on labor, and have counted the losses in membership.

SP: When I started working on national publications, the union president was a very short man. He had a policy that he wanted his picture in the paper a lot, and no picture with anyone taller than him. The president of the Plumbers Union demanded that the captions always start with him. You could run a picture of him and 24 other people—with him in the middle of the fourth row—and the caption would read "Plumbers President Marty Ward and Others." The three major union presidents interviewed in our book reject the idea of self-promotional photos and articles in their house organ, and that shows progress.

FS: The challenge for labor editors is that we go into a situation that is not pure and figure out how you can move it. There were always situa-

tions where we had to make compromises. You have to be there for the long haul.

AD: Tell me an incident where you felt you pushed the parameters and succeeded, and a time when you pushed and got slapped down.

FS: I had pretty free rein. I spent a week in Silver City, New Mexico, where AFSCME had organized the city and county workers and got to retell a famous labor story, *Salt of the Earth*. The workers we organized were the sons and daughters of the workers portrayed in the movie.

It's a wonderful story of a strike and the struggle of women for equality and against the blacklist. I had the freedom to do an article profiling a gay local president. I also wrote about oppression of workers and unions in El Salvador.

SP: An example of positive growth would be the creation of *NEA TODAY*. We built into it a sense of conflict and dissent from the start. We created a letters page including those critical of the union, and built in features that pitted member against member in debate on controversial topics.

FS: My biggest frustration is not being able to push a better approach to covering elections and putting forth the union's approaches on politics. This is where most of the labor press still is totally wooden.

AD: Which of your book's 20 essays do you think are most important?

SP: To me the most significant piece may be Matt Witt's history of *The Mineworker* experience. He is candid not only about the sins of the leadership, but about the limitations of the progressives who tried to

see *Labor*, page 16

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Labor Beat

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change the labor movement.

FS: I like the Stansbury/Siegal piece, which challenges the labor movement to deal with the changing labor force and the new wave of immigrant and non-English-speaking workers; it's one of the issues labor has not dealt with. Very few labor publications have done a good job of it. The authors pulled no punches.

AD: With the newly democratized, progressive Teamsters, is there an opportunity now to put to work all the ideas discussed in your book?

FS: The old magazine was so bad, so full of photos from the president's office and from headquarters. There was very little about members doing anything, a lot of "grin and grab." It's easy to throw that out. Right from the start it's called *The New Teamster*. We have two pages of letters to the editor. We have a focus on how to do things, a rights-on-the-job column, stories on corporate campaigns. There's no president's column. Ron Carey is 100% behind the idea that the union belongs to the members.

We are limited, though, because there are tremendous internal problems. Much of the old guard is still out there. We're trying to use the magazine to report but also to push new ideas. Right now the agenda is to get members involved. We are covering the export of US jobs to El Salvador. We're pointing out in ways that *60 Minutes* and *Nightline* fail to that one of the reasons corporations are moving to El Salvador in droves is that the murder of thousands of trade unionists has made the work force less willing to assert its rights.

There are topics we aren't getting to, however, because the fight is so great inside for the soul of this union. It's a big struggle for change.

AD: How does the result of the presidential election affect your agenda for change in the labor press?

FS: It depends on how unions see their relationship with the Clinton Administration. It's going to challenge us. When a union sees itself tied to the Democratic Party or to a presidency, it's a question how much room will be allocated for criticism. Suppose Bill Clinton were to invade Guatemala—what space will there be in the labor press to raise the issues of how that hurts working people? In terms of the Teamsters,

we've taken the attitude that we don't think Clinton is that great, we knew we had to get rid of Bush, and that we can get some help under Clinton. But we're going to have to fight every step of the way. That will be the tone of the Teamsters.

AD: My impression is that NEA is more enthusiastic about Clinton?

this suggest that the work is done once it's written and presented provocatively? What happens with this stuff after it's written?

SP: Paper can't organize, but it's important. Labor has left this area as a backwater and not paid much attention to it. We have to pay attention because the labor press is the last

labor magazines—and we both agree that the UAW's *Solidarity* is the best—a worker is much more likely to pick up and read a local newsletter, no matter how simple it is. The local paper is indispensable for letting people feel involved in their union.

SP: We have a project to teach

very important within the religious community in building opposition to US Central American policy, for example.

To its detriment, the civil rights community does not have a publication that serves an overall function.

In the environmental movement you have some mass publications, as well as independent publications that allow debates to take place.

A labor weekly definitely would talk about our relations to these other movements. I do a lot of reading in the computer trade. The computer trade press savages the icons—Bill Gates, the other industry leaders are routinely savaged—yet that press is indispensable to the industry; I think it's possible to create a labor press version of that. The trade press analogy is still the right way to go in the beginning. Right now we do have thousands of people who devote their lives to the labor movement—leaders, staff, and activists. That core is not a mass movement but it is enough to support a trade press which could expand into a mass publication.

AD: This is the first presentation of the idea of a national labor publication that anyone has published in a very long time. What happens now? Who is pursuing these goals?

SP: In the next months we hope to find out if there is interest in these ideas. If NEA were to rejoin the AFL-CIO, I think this is something that NEA would be interested in pushing. We've raised the flag, we want to see if anybody salutes.

FS: Or shoots!

SP: Any reporter at a daily paper in the country will rattle off a dozen stories that paper is not covering, or covering inadequately. The reason the labor press is important, not just to union members but to the public at large, is that there is no other widely circulated print vehicle that could pose an alternative to the increasing homogenization of the commercial press. For freedom of press in the country at large, it's important to have a vital, independent labor press that really calls the shots straight. We hope the book will contribute to the realization of that goal.

Al Davidoff is president of UAW local 2300.



Photograph: Charles Harrington

Sam Pizzigati and Fred Soloway

SP: Clinton may create more opportunity for the labor movement the same way FDR's election in 1932 ended up creating more breathing room. I don't think we have to worry about more dramatic things like an invasion of Guatemala. I think the real test will come on things where we are pushing an agenda and there's a compromise that's less than what we want. How do we cover that? Health care is a good example.

FS: On free trade, Clinton is going to be really lousy.

SP: As long as we give members a vehicle where they can speak out, there will be criticism.

AD: You remind us that the labor press is not the answer to the revitalization of the labor movement. But the book is almost exclusively labor journalists commenting on themselves and their world. Does

independent challenge to the increasing conglomerization of the media.

We need to do a lot more in terms of creating interactive mechanisms. One of the things we're talking about doing at NEA is starting a massive computer network where we can have much more dialogue between leaders and members, and from members to members, with the publication serving as a facilitator for those conversations.

FS: You can use a national magazine to show that the union is democratic and open and prints criticism. People will say if you run this critical stuff the bosses will use it to defeat you. We use our publication to show how open we are, to show the vitality of the union.

In any magazine surveys I've ever seen, even with the best national

desk-top publishing to our locals to help them become more creative and independent.

AD: What about the influence of TV? Isn't this where most people get their news these days?

FS: Cracking TV in a substantial way isn't going to happen in the foreseeable future, so our publications remain an essential alternative.

AD: You make an analogy in the book to the computer trade press. Isn't the labor movement more analogous to the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the environmental movement? Is there anything we have to learn from them? Second, is there a way through literature to be better connected with our allies?

SP: Other movements vary. The National Catholic Reporter functions as a trade press, and it's been

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